HINDU INFLUENCE ON GREEK PHILOSOPHY

THE ODYSSEY OF THE SOUL FROM THE UPANISHADS TO PLATO

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To

Ana Maria, John Hallowell, and my parents

and

to my Greek heritage and years in India

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CHAPTER—I

INTRODUCTION

THE ROOTS

THE SIXTH to fourth centuries B. C. marked an extraordinary effervescence of the human mind and spirit in three widely separated places : China, India, and Greece. In China, two great sages were preaching the truths which were later compiled and set down as Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and Confucius *Analects*, while in India, the ferment of philosophic speculation engendered by the seers of the *Upanishads* finally erupted into an open religious revolt by the Buddha and Mahavira (the founder of Jainism) against the Hindu order. This challenge was met by a powerful Hindu "counter-reformation" first in the development of new systems of philosophy based on the *Upanishads* and later by the *Bhakti* movement whose impact still lives on in its timeless "scripture", the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Meanwhile, philosophers from Ionia (Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus) helped to awaken Greece from its "Dark Ages" and usher in the Classical Age and its many great men, talented artists, and gifted thinkers. In the last category, men such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are lasting intellectual landmarks. In short, each of these three civilizations regards this epoch as forming the very well–springs of its cultural and intellectual tradition.

For the Greeks and the Occident, George H. Sabine remarks :

> The teaching of the Athenian Schools (Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum) played as large a part in European civilization as the art of the fifth century. For these Schools mark the beginning of European

philosophy......In this field the writings of Plato and Aristotle were the first great pioneering operations of the European intellect. [1]

The sources of the Indian tradition and social order are more diffuse, with the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. marking the culmination of a long fermentation. Since it is probably less familiar to the Westerner, some explanation of this tradition is in order. It starts with the *Vedas*, a compendium of hymns, chants, rituals, spells, speculations, and stories handed down orally by the Indo-Aryan invaders during their gradual conquest of the Indian subcontinent from around 2,500 B. C. to 1,500 B. C. The compilation of the several strands of the *Vedas* was completed roughly by 1,000 B. C. The Indo-Aryan conquest involved the establishment of a new social and religious order whose rules are delineated with *Torah*-like detail in the *Laws of Manu*, set down anywhere from 1,200 B. C. to the first centuries of the Christian era. [2] Dissatisfied with the oppressive rigidity of this society and the spiritual dictatorship of the Brahmin priests, groups of sages retired to the forests with their students to engage in the metaphysical speculations and esoteric dialogues which became known as the *Upanishads*. Put together from around the eighth to sixth centuries B. C., [3] the *Upanishads* contain the basic teachings for all the later schools and traditions of Hindu philosophy.

The discontent with this social and religious order, however, could not be confined to the forests. Capitalizing on these undercurrents, the teachings of Buddha and Mahavira blossomed into full blown popular religions which shook the Brahmin "establishment" to its foundations. As a Hindu riposte, the *Bhakti* Movement was launched to recapture the people's allegiance by emphasizing a prayerful and personal devotion to Lord Krishna, a form or *avatar* of the deity Vishnu. With the *Upanishads* at too esoteric a level for popular comprehension, the *Bhagavad-Gita* (the Song of God) was written sometime between the fifth and second centuries B.C. as its "scripture," and inserted into the *Mahabharata*, one of India's

two famous epic poems. [4] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy describes the Gita, in his *Hinduism and Buddhism* :

> As a compendium of the whole Vedic doctrine to be found in the earlier Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishads, and being therefore the basis of all later developments, it can be regarded as the focus of all Indian religion. [5]

Leaving aside the consideration of China as well as of Buddhism and Jainism in this paper, [6] there has always been the assumption that the Greeks and Indians drew from very different waters in the formation of their respective cultures. According to this assumption, any suspicious similarities that may turn up which might suggest a sharing or a common source are dismissed as either coincidences or as separate and independent developments. In preserving their sense of uniqueness, both Easterners and Westerners alike seem to have developed vested interests in maintaining a rigid Oriental/Occidental distinction. One implication of this is the belief that in whatever problem they may face—such as political and economic development—they will go about it in their own separate and unique fashion, since their "mind-sets" are so totally different. This belief is questionable because it may not be true.

Apart from some theologians, historians, or others with special Oriental interests, Western scholars generally, and political philosophers particularly, have not included Oriental thought in their horizon of intellectual concerns. Most of it is dismissed as religious, and hence, not worthy of inclusion in a text on philosophy or political theory. Whatever may still be outside of this principle of exclusion due to religious content is considered too unsystematic for scholarly attention. Words of warning like the following from J. Friedrich are rare :

> Anyone who has sometime studied the *Arthashastra* ...will agree that sophistication in matters political had advanced as far in India at the time of Aristotle as it had in the West. [7]

There have been, nevertheless, some noteworthy exceptions. F. S. C. Northrop attempted as early as 1946 to elucidate the primary value differences between the East and the West.[8] Norman Palmer endeavored in 1955 to bring the Eastern tradition of political thought to the attention of Western political science.[9] In fact, D. Mackenzie Brown wrote an introductory textbook on Indian political theory for Western students.[10] Even the eminent political philosopher Eric Voegelin, in his latest volume of *Order and History*, has acknowledged a place for Chinese, Indian and Persian thought.[11]

Indians, too, have sought to keep their thought and culture separate from the West. In discussing the question of Indian influence on Plato, the Indian A. R. Wadia first dismisses it by saying, "similar ideas often arise in different minds in different countries."[12] His second line of defense is to stress the difference in fundamental emphasis between Plato and the *Upanishads* :

> Even assuming that Plato was influenced by India or Iran, it is impossible to overlook the peculiarly Greek stamp of all Plato's Dialogues......The greatest aim of Plato was to bring into being an ideal state .....Like the Greeks generally Plato was intent on making the best of this life.
>
> This was not the aim of the Upanisadic sages of India. Their aim was to obtain moksa or deliverance from the cycle of births and death... ..The Upanisadic seers were not interested in developing an ideal society or State and this justifies the conclusion that Plato remains Greek and the Indian sages remain Indian.[13]

Finally, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, free India's first Minister of Education and a philosopher in his own right, is emphatic in stressing the essential difference between the Indian and the Greek spirit : "In Greece elements of religion acquired the characteristics of philosophy ; in India philosophy was itself turned into religion."[14]

This paper does not dispute the fact that there are vital differences between the East and the West. However,

whatever may have developed over the centuries, the question remains : were these vital differences also present at the roots of the Indian and Greek cultural and intellectual life ? In other words, are the sources of Eastern and Western civilization so independent and mutually exclusive that there is no ground in common or no strand in each other's tradition to which Easterners and Westerners mutually relate ?

As a partial answer, this thesis will examine, specifically, the question of Hindu influence on Plato. Symbolically speaking, do the *Bhagavad-Gita* and Plato's *Republic* rise as two mighty columns standing at either end of a now washed-out bridge or have they always been the foundations of two separate towers ? Thus, in focusing on Plato, this study will deal with only those contacts established between India and Greece prior to Alexander's invasion of the Punjab (327-25 B.C.).

The Symbols

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that concentrating on Plato and the *Bhagavad-Gita* (the latter as a distillation of Upanishadic speculation) as symbols of Eastern and Western thought involves, necessarily, some oversimplifications. Plato, of course, was only a part of Classical Greek thought. There were other important contributors to this tradition, not the least of whom was his pupil Aristotle (385-322 B. C.) While, in my view, the two shared a common perspective on the proper concerns of philosophy and agreed on the fundamentals of political society, they did have certain differences in approach. Plato is conventionally regarded as having been the mystic and Atistotle as having his mind fixed on practical observation and classification. However, this traditional division should be treated with caution. Plato's *Statesman* and *Laws*, for example, are anything but mystical, and Aristotle, in his later years, admitted that his attention turned increasingly toward the myths.

A further complication with Plato, particularly in comparing him to the Hindus, was that he never committed his

deepest thoughts to writing. In delineating his four stages of cognition or his system of education leading to an apprehension of the Absolute Good in the *Republic*, for example, while explicit on the early stages, he never defined the Absolute Good or revealed the nature of the Dialectic. Instead he resorted to myths to give his interlocutors an "idea" of what was beyond their perceptual abilities. Thus, any attempt at a final rendering of Plato's thought is ultimately elusive. Plato himself doomed any such efforts by his comment in his Second Letter :

> There is not, and there never will be a written treatise of Plato's. Those that are called his are really the teaching of Socrates restored to youth and beauty. (314c)[15]

Despite these problems, few would argue with the contention that Plato represents a cornerstone of Western thought.

The task of distilling Hindu thought to anything like a unified body of teachings is even more difficult. The esoteric speculations and dialogues of the Upanishadic seers do not boil down to a consistent set of philosophic doctrines, despite the attempts of the commentator Sankara (eighth century A. D.) and the modern philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan to put a monist or Vedantic cast to them. From the sixth to the third centuries B.C., six schools of Hindu philosophy emerged from the *Upanishads*.[16] Arising from this same ferment were the non-Hindu and atheistic *(nastika)* teachings of Buddha and Mahavira, as well as those of the *Carvaka* materialists, in the sixth century B. C.

The oldest of these Hindu schools was the *Samkhya*, dating back to 500 B. C.,[17] which was dualist in that it posited two primal principles : *purusha* (spirit) and *prakriti* (substance). Closely associated with it was the *Yoga* school. The *Vaiseshika* and *Nyaya* schools (the latter extending from 450 B. C. to 150 A. D.) shared a common concern for logic and epistemology.[18] Finally, the *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* schools, with their monist world view, gradually gained the greatest prominence.

Thus, although a monist interpretation of both Plato and the *Upanishads* has become dominant, both had their dualist aspects. In the case of Plato, Voegelin cites the following passage from the *Laws* to show the development of a dualist strain in Plato's later years :

> *Athenian* : One soul or more. More than one——I will answer for you ; at any rate, we must not suppose that there are less than two——one the author of good, and the other of evil. (896e)[19]

Nevertheless, despite passages like this, Plato, in the bulk of his writings, shows himself to be a monist, and even the *Upanishads* convey some areas of fundamental agreement. Dasgupta, who does so much to highlight the different interpretations of the *Upanishads*, concedes that all schools of Hindu philosophy agree that each self has a soul, that each soul undergoes rebirth, and that a soul may be purified and escape from these rebirths.[20] Summing up this discussion, Dasgupta observes :

> The fundamental idea which runs through the early *Upanishads* is that underlying the exterior world of change there is an unchangeable reality which is identical with that which underlies the essence in man. If we look at Greek Philosophy ......in Plato......we find the same tendency towards glorifying one unspeakable entity on the reality or the essence.[21]

In the sea of all these differences on both sides, it is the presence of this fundamental similarity that raises the central question of this study : was there a Hindu influence on Plato ?

In attacking this question, the second chapter will delineate the various similarities and coincidences between ancient Hindu and Greek society as well as Hindu and Platonic thought. With these similarities as a background, the third chapter will examine the evidence for and against a bridge between Hindu India and Plato. In light of this historical discussion, it will also be important to note what Plato did and did not observe about the world of

the "barbarians". Following this, the fourth chapter will try to determine if the remnants of this bridge can be found in a Pythagorean-Orphic Mysteries connection. With the evidence all in, the concluding chapter will present this study's assessment of the question of Hindu influence on Plato and close with some contemporary implications.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory,* third edition (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961), p. 35. Obviously, in the case of the West, its cultural roots are found not just in the Greeks, but in the simultaneous fusion of, and tension between, the Greek and Judeo-Christian mind and spirit.
2. Max Muller, *India: What Can it Teach US ?* (London : Longmans, Green, and Co., 1919), p. 12. From this rather extended range of chronological possibilities, one can see that the dating of ancient Indian writings has posed some problems. Many of the *Laws of Manu* are listed in the *Mahabharata,* whose compilation was begun around the fifth century B.C. See : William Theodore De Bary and T. Embree Ainslie, eds., *A Guide to Oriental Classics,* second edition (New York : Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 63. Thus, whenever they were formally set down, they were no doubt fully incorporated into Hindu society by the end of the sixth century B.C. In fact, it was the very oppressiveness of these rules during this period that helped to bring about the Buddhist and Jainist rebellions.
3. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "The Meaning of Philosophy," in *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western,* vol. 1. ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), p. 19.
4. *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita,* translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York : The New American Library, Inc., 1951), p. 28.
5. Ibid., p. 13.
6. Although, by implication, many of the findings of this study are also relevant to Buddhism and Jainism.

7. Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy,* fourth edition (Waltham, Mass. : Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1968), p. 591. The *Arthashastra,* though the most notable, is not the only place in ancient Indian writings where questions of political theory are addressed. The epic poem *Mahabharata,* in which the *Bhagavad-Gita* is found, contains a long discourse between Yudhishthir and Bhisma on the art of government. See : Lin Yutang ed., *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York : Random House Inc., 1942), p. 135. As a further example, A. L. Basham cites the ancient Indian myth of *Mahasammata* ("the Great Chosen One") "The story of the *Mahasammata* gives in the form of a myth worthy of Plato, one of the world's earliest versions of the widespread contractual theory of the state......It implies that the main purpose of government is to establish order, and that the king, as head of the government, is the first social servant." See : A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (New York : Grove Press, Inc., 1954). p. 82.

   Putting the degree of ancient Indian political thought in a comparative perspective, Basham concludes : "From the days of Plato and Aristotle European thought has turned its attention to such questions as the origin of the state, the ideal form of government, and the basis of law......India also thought on such questions, but she had no schools of political philosophy in the Western sense. The problems which form the stock-in-trade of the European political philosopher are answered in a take-it-or-leave-it manner, with little discussion; often indeed the only argument in favor of a proposition is the citation of an old legend, used much as Plato's adaptation of older myths to reinforce his theories." (See : Ibid., p. 79.) However, the Indian political scientist A. S. Alteker insists that there was a science of polity in ancient India, and notes that as early as the sixth century B. C. there were a number of books on the subject. See : A. S. Alteker, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Delhi, India : Motilal Banarsidass, 1958), pp. 4-6.
8. Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West, An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (New York : The Macmillan Co., 1946).
9. Norman D. Palmer, "India and Western Political Thought : Coalescence or Clash ?" *American Political Science Review* 49 (September 1955) : 747-62.
10. D. Mackenzie Brown, *The White Umbrella : Indian Political Thought from Manu to Gandhi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal. : University of California Press, 1953).

11. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4 : *The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge, La. : Louisiana State University Press, 1974), esp. pp. 302, 319-22.
12. A. R. Wadia, "Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle," in *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western*, vol. 2, edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1953), p. 65.
13. Ibid.
14. Azad, p. 18.
15. Plato, *The Platonic Epistles*, trans. J. Harward (London : Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 103. I find Harward's careful defense of the validity of most of the Platonic letters persuasive. (See : ibid., esp , pp. 58-78.)
16. Benjamin Walker, *Hindu World : An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. 2 (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd,, 1968). p. 203.
17. Ibid., pp. 344-45.
18. Ibid., p. 204.
19. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 3 : *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge, La : Louisiana State University Press, 1957), p. 286.
20. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London : Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 74-75.
21. Ibid., p. 42.

Chapter—II

THE COINCIDENCES

Base Line Assumptions

Life Is full of coincidences, or incidents that happen together for no discernible reason or cause. Statistically, such phenomena of happenstance are referred to as random correlations linked together by purely spurious relationships. However, when these coincidences begin to pile up and repeat themselves across a broad spectrum of variables, the spuriousness and randomness of these coincidences become suspect and a search is launched for an explanation. It is the purpose of this chapter to note a sufficient number of coincidences between Classical Greece and Classical India to demonstrate a clear need for an explanation.

More specifically, the similarities between India and Greece generally, and Platonic and Hindu thought particularly, are the dependent variables of this study, or the phenomena requiring explanation. If one assumes that all human beings share a similar nature and react to the factors of existence in the same ways, then it is the differences that require explanation and not the similarities. Human beings, for example, certainly experience heat, cold, rage, pain, and desire as well as fear, love, indignation, sorrow, and joy for pretty much the same reasons. However, if one moves one step further and accepts the premise that over time people in one context begin to develop different interpretations of their common humanity from people in another, then similarities again become important. People in the valleys may become frightened of water because of

waterfalls and floods whereas hill people may be indifferent to water but fear lightning. Over a greater period of time as their populations multiply and their social structures become more articulated, the two peoples will begin to develop their own distinctive cultures based on the different circumstances of their physical contexts or environments. In short, fundamental differences in world view and culture soon become expected.

In this regard, it must be admitted that undergirding these assumptions is a notion of "progress" in the development of thought. Progress, not in the sense of development from better to best, false to true, or primitive to modern, but progress viewed from a somewhat different perspective, namely, that in isolation a man's thought is limited by his time/space environment and experience; however, he can break out of this trap (of environmentalism and historicism) by learning from the experiences and perspectives of others and thereby transcend his own individual or societal limitations to an apprehension of that which is universal. Thus, by himself (unless he receives a divine revelation) man cannot begin to see beyond his immediate context unless he is exposed to the thought, contexts, and experiences of others. Then, through a process of comparison, he can move towards an understanding of what is true for all men in all places.

Following this chain of assumptions, important similarities between cultures can be explained on two grounds. First, they can be explained by contact between the cultures. If hill peoples, who have no reason to fear water, begin to fear it, it is not unlikely that this is because someone from the valley told them of the destruction wreaked by flooding waters. Second, they can be explained by spontaneous developments within a society independent of external influences and contacts.

This latter ground is again based on the assumption that men, sharing a common nature and facing the same

problems of existence, will arrive at similar solutions, devices, and beliefs. While this may be easily accepted at the level of basic problems of human existence, it becomes more difficult to accept at more complex levels of social organization and thought. As a hypothetical example, in my view, it is easy to accept independent, spontaneous inventions of the wheel, but it is far less easy to accept a spontaneous explanation for two war chariots from two different cultures which are similar in design and construction down to minute details. In the same vein, it is easy to accept an independent, spontaneous development of the belief in rebirth in many "primitive" cultures, but when two cultures, such as those of Classical Greece and India, share elements of an elaborate doctrine of salvation based on a belief in a soul and in its eventual purification through rebirths, an explanation of independent and spontaneous development becomes far less credible than one acknowledging some contact between the cultures.

Thus, regarding the two above-mentioned explanations for similarities among different cultures, it is the base line assumption of this study that the greater the number of similarities noted between the two cultures, particularly in areas not rooted to a society's physical environment, the more reliance must be placed on an explanation involving some contact between these cultures. This is particularly true of two highly articulated cultures, such as those of Classical Greece and India, where distinctive paradigms of world views had arisen. Incidentally, this chain of assumptions does not resolve the question of the independent existence or reality of an absolute truth ; it merely concerns itself with the manner in which men acquire their perceptions of phenomena and universal truths (or beliefs). This chapter, then, seeks to determine if there are enough similarities or coincidences between the Greeks and the Indians to merit an explanation on the basis of contacts between the two cultures.

SIMILARITIES

General

The method of delineating these coincidences will be to move from general points in common between ancient India and ancient Greece, to general concerns which Plato (428-347 B. C.) shared with the Indians of his time, and, finally, to a more careful consideration of points which are central to Plato's thought which find a similar expression in Indian thought.

More specifically, under general points in common, a parallel world-view of moral order, striking similarities in the popular religions of the two countries, and common themes in the two epics of Greece (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) and of India (the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*) will be noted. Regarding the general concerns shared by Plato and the Indians, the quest for the Ultimate Good, the stress on moral education, and the presentation of ideas by means of the Socratic dialogue will also be briefly discussed. The central points which will be discussed at somewhat greater length are both sides' view of secular justice, the soul, and the way to salvation. In addition, quick mention will be made of aspects of Plato's thought which have frequently provoked controversy, but which if an Hindu connection is assumed, are readily explained, to wit, the Myth of the Cave and Plato's advocacy of communal property and family relations.

Even though the chain of assumptions guiding this discussion moved past differences to a stress on similarities, these similarities can be placed in their proper perspective only if the differences are fully appreciated as well. Throughout this study attempts will be made to give differences their due regard and show where some of the similarities either break down or are not clear. In this chapter, besides noting some general differences to points made earlier, the use of reason by both the Greeks and Indians will also be discussed in some detail.

To begin with, both the ancient Indian and the ancient Greek had a fundamental belief in an underlying moral order within the universe. The Indians used the term *rta* to express this concept. *Rta,* in turn, was held together by *karman* which, in a manner of speaking, was the cosmic regulating principle of the universe.[1] This was similar to the Greeks' belief in a world or reason *(dike)* whose basic principles were ultimately discernible through knowledge. Thus, in both cultures, a quest was possible for the truth of the nature of reality through knowledge.

Beyond a general belief in moral order, the popular religions that developed in the early periods of these civilizations bear some striking similarities. In both Indian and Greek mythology the center of the world was a sacred mountain which served as the abode of the Gods—Mount Olympus in the case of the Greeks and Mount Meru for the Indians.[2] While both had myriads of gods, goddesses, and demi-gods which developed out of their own particular geographies and amalgamations with subject peoples, the supernatural order of both India and Greece coalesced around three principal deities with one of them a *primus inter pares.* In the case of India, it was Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer, with Brahma at the head.[3] The well known Greek trinity consisted of the three brothers : Zeus the God of the Heavens and the world below and, hence, the most important ; Poseidon the God of the Sea; and Hades the God of the Underworld. In addition, some of the earliest names for the gods as well as other terms are so close linguistically that it is difficult to resist the notion that they partook of some common Indo-Aryan source, or engaged in at least some subsequent sharing.[4]

For both Greece and India, their epic poems, which can be dated at very roughly the same time,[5] provided the folklore and stock of conventional wisdom which cemented their respective identities as distinct peoples.[6] As building blocks of uniqueness, the epics of Greece and India certainly have some cardinal differences in scope, theme, style, and

message; yet they also have some striking features in common. All the principal heroes in both the Indian and the Greek epics are introduced by elaborate recitations of their noble deeds and qualities, and are referred to throughout by the most grandiloquent titles. The culminating battles of both the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad* center around chariots : in the Indian case it is Arjuna's long dialogue with his charioteer Krishna on the eve of the titanic battle at Kurukshetra (a dialogue more commonly referred to as the *Bhagavad-Gita*) and in the *Iliad*, of course, it is Hector's battle with Achilles. Another parallel lies in the test of drawing a bow. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses wins back his kingdom and Penelope by drawing his old bow and then killing the suitors who had failed in the same effort. Arjuna again, in the *Mahabharata*, had to win the hand of Draupadi by drawing a bow and hitting a target.

In this vein, Lin Yutang draws parallels between the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad* on the one hand and the *Ramayana* and the *Odyssey* on the other. In comparing the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*, he speaks of both reproducing the "epic impression" :

> The subject of the Epic was the same, dealing with the long drawn-out war between the Kurus and the Panchalas as Homer dealt with the Trojan war. The treatment was the same : the delineation of the character of the warriors, the "tiger-wasted" Bhisma, the "helmit-wearing (sic) Arjuna" (the Achilles of the epic), the royal and dignified Yudhisthir (suggesting Agamemnon), the vengeance of Arjuna for the death of his boy, the fierce contests, and rounds of combats between heroes of the opposing camps, the Homeric speeches before the combats, the Councils of War, and the presence of gods and celestial spirits all reproduce the epic impression. [7]

However, when he compares the *Ramayana* and the *Odyssey*, Lin Yutang admits that the similarities are not as close. Mainly they lie in the "epic" wanderings of Rama and Sita in India and of Ulysses in the Aegean. Also, both test the measure of their heroine's fidelity, with Penelope's waiting weaving and Sita's virtue in captivity.[8] With both sets of epics, even the *Ramayana* and the *Odyssey*, the list could go on. Suffice it to say that as repositories of their popular cultures, the epics of Greece and India suggest that the two societies did contain parallels.

Plato And The Upanishadic Tradition

Education, the highest good, and justice

Moving on from general points in common between the two cultures, Plato, as a crucial formulator of Greek Thought, displays many of the same concerns as the ancient Indian thinkers. Chapter Three of the *Bhagavad-Gita* opens with Arjuna's request to his charioteer Krishna, "Tell me one definite way of reaching the highest good." [9] Essentially, the rest of the dialogue is a sermon on reaching this highest good. Plato's *Republic* asks the same question about the Absolute Good and provides several different approaches to an answer.

More than just a common question, Plato and the Indians come to much the same conclusions. Consider these two expressions of the good which Radhakrishnan quotes from the *Katha Upanishad* and Plato's *Phaedrus :*

> *Katha* : Different is the good; and different, indeed, is the pleasant. These two with different purposes, bind a man. Of these two, it is well for him who takes hold of the good, but he who chooses the pleasant, fails of his own aim.
>
> *Phaedrus* : In everyone of us there are two ruling and directing principles, whose guidance we follow wherever they may lead; the one being an innate device of pleasure, the other an acquired judgment which aspires after excellence. Now these two principles at one time maintain harmony, while at

> another they are at feud within us, and now one and now the other obtains mastery.[10]

While in this case Plato's explanation is a bit more elaborate, except for subtle nuances, these definitions are near-perfect mirrors of each other.

In taking hold of the good, both Plato and the Indians prescribe a vigorous course of moral education. While Plato's education program describes in detail a comprehensive system for the ordering and uplifting of an entire society, the four *ashramas* of Hinduism outline the tasks and goals for more general stages of life.[11] Yet in fundamental purpose, they are the same. Freed from the attachments and duties of the household, the Indian devotee moves on to become a sage or detached wanderer contemplating the nature of reality and trying to perceive the good.

Because of Plato's strong views on the intimate ties of an individual to his polis (good men make a good polis and a good polis allows good men and the philosophers to rise up), he could hardly endorse the life of a detached wanderer. Yet in the *Republic* he warns of the corrupting effect the good things of life can have on the soul :

> Strangest of all, everyone of those qualities which we approve—courage, temperance and all the rest—tends to ruin its possessor and to wrest his mind away from philosophy,...all the good things of life, as they are called, corrupt and distract the soul : beauty, wealth, strength, powerful connexions (sic), and so forth. (VI. 491)[12]

In fact, towards the end of his discussion on the philosopher-king, Plato concludes, much like the Hindus, that truth can be seen only if the philosopher detaches himself from pleasure :

> Wisdom, it seems, is certainly the virtue of some diviner faculty... If the growth of a nature like this had been pruned from earliest childhood, cleared of those clinging overgrowths which come of gluttony and all luxurious pleasure and... hang upon the soul, bending its vision downwards; if, freed from these, the souls were turned around towards true reality, then this same power...would see the truth. (VII.519)[13]

In doing their educating, it is interesting to note that both Plato and the Indians employed the technique of the dialogue, or science of the "dialectic." Plato, until the very end of his career, used the format of a dialogue between Socrates and various foils to present his ideas. Particularly in the *Brhadaranyaka* and the *Chandogya Upanishads*, the sage Yajnavalkya used dialogues to expound his teachings.[14] Perhaps the most famous of these dialogues are those with Svetaketu, the eager young student, whose rational arguments, bound up in the *maya* world of illusion or appearances, are to no avail against the sage's insight into Ultimate Reality. Furthermore, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as noted earlier, is essentially a dialogue between Arjuna the warrior-hero and Krishna the charioteer-deity, with Krishna launching on extended answers to Arjuna's "ultimate" questions. After each answer Arjuna, enlightened, responds, "My delusion is destroyed." As set forth by Plato, this was the very purpose of Socrates' dialogues : to liberate his interlocutors and his audiences from the strictures of conventional thinking so that they could dispell their delusions and discover the truth for themselves.

The question of the highest good or absolute good is central to both Plato and the early Indian thinkers. This centrality makes it doubly remarkable that their conclusions are so similar. The answer to Arjuna's request to be told one definite way to the highest good is one of the most-quoted passages of Hindu "scriptures" :

> It is better to do your own duty, however imper-

> fectly, than to assume the duties of another person, however successfully.[15]

Or, in another translation :

> Better one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another, well performed.[16]

When one places Plato's classic definition of justice in Book IV of the *Republic* alongside that of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* one wonders how the two could have been so remote from each other geographically :

> Everyone ought to perform the one function in the community for which his nature best suited him...and when each order—tradesman, Auxiliary, Guardian—keeps to its own proper business in the commonwealth and does its own work, that is justice and what makes a just society.[17]

Also, at least the latter half of this definition is the very conception of justice and society which undergirds the *Laws of Manu*.

Much has been made of the difference in these conceptions of justice arising from Plato's advocacy of merit as the basis of job or role selection and the *Bhagavad-Gita's* call for adherence to caste obligations. This principle of merit is frequently bandied about as one of the essences of the Western spirit. In fact, in the way in which Plato set up his "meritocracy," the societal effect may have been far more Confucian than "democratic."

The key to advancement in Plato's *Republic* lay in its educational system. Through educational training a child's character was revealed, whether it was of gold, silver, or metal; and it was in school where a child's social station was assigned. A crucial question remains : Who was permitted to attend school ? Children of the Guardian and Auxiliary classes were certainly included, but Plato was not explicit about the inclusion of tradesmen children. Plato's "meritocracy," then, may have extended only to the upper classes.

In the Allegory of the Metals, he did make it clear that children of gold could come from the tradesmen class.[18] However, he set the Republic up in such a way that Guardians would selectively breed and nurture Guardians both through the educational system and eugenic "marriages." Regarding the educational system, Plato observed:

> If a sound system of nurture and education is maintained, it produces men of a good disposition, these in their turn, taking advantage of such education, develop into better men than their forbears. [IV. 423—24][19]

This elite of the excellent was fed by his marriage system which was, among other things, an eugenic plan to inter-breed the Guardian class who were then singled out for special nurture.[20] In effect, it was almost a system of engineered merit by birth. Certainly this may have been different in intent from a caste system, but perhaps not so different in effect. At the end of his life, by abandoning these attempts at eugenic engineering in the *Laws,* Plato may have implicitly recognized this.

Conception of the soul

In any case, Plato's *Republic* makes much more sense as a treatise on the soul and the path to its salvation than as a scheme for a political utopia. The dialogue opens with an old man's remarks about approaching death and what may happen after it, and ends with the Myth of Er's tale of final judgment. A. E. Taylor maintains that the *Republic*'s fundamental question is, "How does a man attain or forfeit eternal salvation ?"[21] Indeed, most of Plato's more important dialogues, with the possible exception of the *Laws*, are far more concerned with the tendance of the soul than of the state. Similarly, while the preoccupation of the *Upanishads* with the soul is unmistakable, the orthodox Hindu interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is as a divine summons to caste obligation. However, to Mahatma Gandhi and others its real message is of the soul's struggle against evil to win release (*moksha*).[22]

Accordingly, attention will now be turned to what Plato and the Indians said about the soul and its "salvation."

In this discussion of the soul it shall soon be clear that in general outline the Platonic and Upanishadic view of the soul is nearly identical. To begin with, in the *Timaeus* Plato talks of a Demi-Urge, a Supreme Deity who creates a universal World-Soul through which the universe becomes an organism. This World-Soul bears the images of the ideas whose Ultimate Idea, the Idea of Absolute Good (which encompasses everything), resides in the Demi-Urge or Supreme Deity.[23] Each individual has its *Nous*, or mortal soul which is a fragment of the Universal Soul or Immortal Soul. Plato's *Nous* can be equated with the Hindu *Atman*, that part within each individual which is divine and whose goal for the Hindu is to be reabsorbed in the Ultimate Reality, the *Brahman*. Thus, Plato's concept of the mortal soul and the Immortal Soul can be translated to the *jivatman* (Individual Soul) and *paramatman* (World-Soul) of Indian philosophy. [24]

Much like the *Nous* is a fragment of the Universal Soul, the *atman* is regarded as a fragment or *anisa* of the Supreme Soul. As an Upanishadic seer put it, "just as the space within a jar does not differ from the space without, so the individual soul is identical with the universal."[25] This identity of the individual soul and Supreme Soul is the central teaching of the *Upanishads*, especially of the Vedantic school or tradition. The realization of this identity constitutes true knowledge and is the prerequisite condition of salvation.[26] All of this is at the level of ultimate reality or primal essence, a world beyond time and space and without differentiating qualities or substance. This is the level of *nirguna* (without quality) to the Hindu and the Absolute Good *(Agathon)* to Plato.

The created universe or the material, sensate world of time and space is Plato's world of forms or appearance *(doxa)* and the Hindu's world of illusion *(maya)*. To the Hindu, the *maya* world is composed of qualities or *gunas*, whose nature, amount, and reality are a subject of dispute among the philosophic schools of Hinduism. Nevertheless, all agree that in this *maya* world both material substances and the soul are the results of various combinations of *gunas* which have both individual and universal mainfestations. Admittedly, this glosses over some very complicated arguments within Hinduism to say nothing of the various interpretations of Plato's metaphysics, but the purpose of this discussion has been to point out that for both Plato and the Hindus, the soul exists at both an individual and universal level as well as at a material and spiritual plane.

On the spiritual Plane, Plato's soul is the *Nous* or divine faculty of wisdom within men capable of apprehending the Absolute Good. Since this is beyond the world of forms, Plato declines to describe it. The Hindus are more forthcoming in delineating the soul at this spiritual or qualityless plane and its relationship to the material or *maya*-bound soul. Dasgupta explains :

> The true self manifests itself in all the processes of our phenomenal existences [such as in the *gunas* of the material soul : *Sattva, Rajas*, and *Tamas*], but ultimately when it retires back to itself, it can no longer be found in them. It is a state of absolute infinitude of pure intelligence *(Cit)*, pure being *(Sat)*, and pure blessedness *(Ananda)*.[27]

In describing the soul at the material plane, both Plato and the Hindus rely on a three part formulation. Further, each of the constituent parts of Plato's soul has its own distinctive qualities and its own virtue, as does that of the Indians. For Plato, *Epithumia* is the appetitive or desiring part and is characterized by the human drives for food, sex, and other needs of the senses. Its virtue is moderation. *Thumos* is the part of will and passion and is the cause of feelings of confidence, delight, affection, grief, and anger. Its virtue is courage. And *Logistikon* is the thinking and reasoning part, and where

reside the qualities of reasoning and understanding. In a larger sense, this is the *Nous* and its virtue is wisdom.[28]

The three parts of the Hindu soul consist of the three *gunas* which are the three forces, substances, or qualities composing the created universe: *Tamas, Rajas*, and *Sattva*.[29] At the universal level, *Tamas* is inertia or fixed matter, *Rajas* is the principle of motion, and *Sattva* of equilibrium.[30] At the human, individual, or material level, the *gunas* assume their mental and moral forms, and, as delineated by Urwick, are uncannily interchangeable with Plato's scheme outlined above.

Tamas (which corresponds to *Epithumia*) is the desiring element. Its highest end is sense pleasure and its constant characteristic is ignorance. While it posesses no virtue, it is capable of control by the higher faculties, in which case the man is called temperate. *Rajas (Thumos)* can best be defined as emotional energy and passion together with the impulse and ambition toward success. Thus it is characterized by a pushiness coupled with excitability and restlessness. However, it also has a gentler side of affection and the capabilities of fortitude, courage, and devotion. Its objects are power and profit. At its best it possesses the virtue of tenacious loyalty to the orders given by the highest faculty. And *Sattva (Logistikon)* is the faculty or potentiality of knowing and understanding completely. Its peculiar virtue is the practical wisdom which the Romans called *Prudentia*. Theoretically it is the faculty that can know and understand the phenomena of this world.[31]

The parts, clearly, are virtually identical, but they do function together a bit differently. The Hindus, in effect, posit an equilibrium model which exists only when *Sattva* is firmly in charge. Plato, taking a subtly different tack, gives each part its virtue and sees the ideal condition of the soul as a harmony based on a cooperation of all parts in the whole. Justice or temperance of the soul consists, then, of each part performing its fittest function

(its virtue) properly.[32] Nevertheless, Radhakrishnan is right, in comparing the *Katha Upanishad* with Plato, to observe:

> In spite of differences in details, the *Katha Upanishad* and Plato agree in looking upon intelligence as the ruling power of the soul (called *buddhi* or *vijnana* by the Upanishad and *nous* by Plato) and aiming at the integration of the different elements of human nature.[33]

Both Plato and the Hindus go one step further and apply their three-part classification of the soul to society, a classification which may also reflect common underlying Indo-Aryan origins. For the Hindus each of the twice-born castes (excluding the *Shudras* or serfs) are assigned a *guna*. The *Vaishya* caste (the merchant and artisan caste), not very flatteringly, is assigned *Tamas* and reflect ignorant desire. The *Kshatriya* (or warrior and ruler caste) with their passionate and fighting spirits reflect the quality of *Rajas*. And naturally the *Brahmins* (the priests) represent *Sattva*, the principle of prudent reason.[34]

Urwick is quick to point out how easily this scheme fits in with Plato's: the *Vaishyas* corresponding to the tradesmen, the Kshatriyas with the Auxiliaries, and the *Brahmins* with the Guardians.[35] Plato, of course, also carries his analysis of the soul, in the *Republic*, to a lengthy exposition of how a degeneration of the soul's harmony is reflected in the degeneration of an individual's life as well as in the deterioration of a polis from one increasingly worse form of government to another, defined by the particular condition of the polis' soul.

This remarkably similar conception of the soul, as outlined above, leads to some other important points of tangency between Plato and the Hindus. Mention has already been made of their common stress on moral education. In addition, the nature of this education, as espoused by Plato's *Phaedrus* and Chapter Four of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, is built on the same chain of assumptions, however widely different

they may be in details. First, the process of education is basically a task of remembering knowledge of, about, and from previous lives. Thus the goal of education is to ask the right questions which will trigger these memories. Hence, knowledge is self-evident and a matter of self-discovery. In this regard, one may recall that Socrates saw his "mission' as playing the midwife to the birth of ideas.

Moving to the highest rung of this education, to the brink of self-awareness and enlightenment, both Plato and the Hindus use the same imagery to describe it. In speaking of this highest stage, Ernest Barker observes that Plato:

> Writes no longer of suggestion and the plasticity of the soul, but of illumination, the slow turning of the eye to the pure light, and the gradual winning by the soul of wisdom through arduous effort and strict self-discipline.[36]

To the Hindu this sums up very well the third *ashrama:* the stage of the wandering ascetic and forest sage. Similarly reflecting this image of illumination, in Chapter Two of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna cites a series of examples of enlightenment, ending each with the phrase, "I call him illumined."

Those who attain illumination are called philosopher-kings if one asks Plato, and *Rishirajas* (Sage Rulers) if one asks the Hindus. While the *Rishirajas* represent the final stage of the four *ashramas* and are not, specifically, political figures like the philosopher-kings, the possibility of their becoming rulers of mankind is left open.[37] In describing his philosopher-king, Plato would not quarrel with the heart of the message of the *Bhagavad-Gita* which Mahatma Gandhi characterized as "desirelessness," in the sense of being free from attachments.[38] Indeed, as mentioned earlier, in the last stages of the philosopher-king's education, Plato's greatest fear was that his man would succumb to such attachments as praise, envy, honor, and pride; and thereby lose his clear vision of the good.[39]

Whether religious or political, both, who have seen the light, are bound to return to the world and show the way to others. Plato is very clear on this in the *Republic:*

> Hence the philosopher cannot be true to himself without being a philosopher-king; he cannot win salvation without bringing it down to his society.[40]

Krishna's answer to Arjuna on the path to Ultimate Truth also includes a call to return, although in terms that are a little less strong:

> Do your duty, always; but without attachment. That is how a man reaches the Ultimate Truth...Your motive...should be to set others, by your example, on the path of duty.[41]

Metempsychosis and Reminiscence

The common conception of the soul Plato shares with the Hindu leads him to a similar belief in the doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul. Although A. E. Taylor may be right that this reincarnation view of the soul's immortality rests on a choice between two pre-philosophic traditions—one outlining endless reincarnations until final absorption into the Ultimate (according to one of two Indian paths of reincarnation) and the other holding that the soul is a fallen divinity destined to regain its place among the gods (Plato's belief)[42] —this does not mean that the two are mutually exclusive or that they lack numerous features in common. In the following brief outline of the Platonic and Upanishadic beliefs of reincarnation, differences in detail will surely emerge, but their fundamental affinity will be even more noteworthy.

In the Upanishadic tradition, reincarnation is likened to the leaping of a caterpillar from one blade of grass to another. More purposively, it is also described as a goldsmith taking a lump of raw gold and molding it into a new statue, and then repeating the process, refining and purifying its form and substance until it is without blemish, and, finally, it melts away and escapes from this constant reforming. *Moksha*, or release, is the goal of every man,

and consists of the soul's freedom from the need to be reborn. These rebirths follow the principle of *karman*, which, simplistically, operates on a you-reap-what-you-sow basis. Or, as Yajnavalkya puts it in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad:*

> As is a man's desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such is the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself.[43]

Plato's views on reincarnation are perhaps most clearly set forth in the *Phaedrus*. In this dialogue he affirms that all souls are of one nature, whether belonging to gods or men, and all existed at first in the highest region of heaven. However, not all were able to stay at the heights and some began to attach matter and bodies to themselves until they fell down from heaven. Once fallen, a soul cannot return to this true, highest home for 10,000 years, which are divided into ten 1,000-year periods, each consisting of one incarnation and the time of punishment or blessedness afterwards. When each 1,000-year period is up, the soul must choose his next life in the manner prescribed in the *Republic*'s Myth of Er.[44] Essentially this method also follows a you-reap-what-you-sow principle.[45] Characteristically, Plato is careful to provide for one exception to this ten millenial cycle, to wit, the philosopher who has loved wisdom and beauty during his lifetime can be set free after the third cycle, if he has chosen the same life three times in a row.[46]

Thus, especially for true philosophers, Plato's view of reincarnation is not quite as endless as that of some of the Hindus, who speak of rebirths extending for near infinitudes of time. However, Radhakrishnan lifts out, in all this, a very fundamental point of congruence. In the Myth of Er, Plato has his souls choosing their next incarnations at the feet of "Lachesis, daughter of necessity," who is, to Radhakrishnan, the law of *karman* personified.[47]

By way of addendum, there are two points to Plato's thought that have provoked controversy among political the-

orists—his advocacy of communal wives and child-rearing and the Myth of the Cave—which, if some link with India is accepted, become more quickly sensible. On Plato's advocacy of a communal system for mating and child-rearing, debate still rages over whether or not the proposal was serious. With a Hindu link accepted, one can see that Plato intended the proposal as a means of freeing the philosopher kings of the obligations of family and property ties and thereby securing the necessary detachment for an unencumbered contemplation of the good, much as the Hindu seeker of enlightenment forsook the duties of the household for the quiet of the forest.[48]

Also, the Myth or Allegory of the Cave, while more directly related to the Orphic Mysteries (which shall be taken up in Chapter IV), becomes easily recognized as a framework for describing the way to spiritual realization or the awakening of the soul which the Hindus compressed into the phrase, "*Tat Tvam Asi*" (That Thou [one's soul] Art). In Hindu parlance, the Myth of the Cave clearly spells out what is meant by *Jnana-Yoga*, the path of Knowledge.[49]

Differences

General

As promised at the beginning of this chapter, the discussion of historical evidence shall not commence until some important differences separating Plato's thought from his Hindu counterparts have been aired. Even in the discussion thus far, several differences have already suggested themselves which, if not at least mentioned, might destroy the balance of this presentation.

To begin with, referring briefly to general similarities between the cultures, while some similarities have been noted between the Hindu and Greek pantheons, there were equally as many differences. Perhaps a few examples will suffice. At the very top of their mythological hierarchies, the general nature and responsibilities of the Greek and Indian trinities were perceived quite differently—with Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades seen as commanding distinct territo-

ries and Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu as responsible for three inter-related processes of the life cycle—creation, destruction, and preservation.

Also, as mentioned earlier (n. 3), the *Trimurti* never really took root in India. Brahma, the Creator, was never successful in gaining many worshippers. In all of India there are only two temples dedicated to Brahma, neither of them active. Rather than a *Trimurti*, the Vedic religion was henotheistic with different gods all-powerful in various types of activities.[50] Further, in the Myth of Er, despite a common karmic, you-reap-what-you-sow principle of judgment, Plato's insistence on an element of choice, however circumscribed by one's experiences in previous lives, remains singular.

In addition, there is one important point where the resemblance between the philosopher-king and the *Rishiraja* breaks down. As mentioned earlier, a philosopher-king cannot win his salvation unless he, symbolically, returns to the cave and picks up the reins of government. No such requirement is levied on the *Rishiraja*. The possibility is merely left open. This once again illustrates the political emphasis to Plato's writings. Despite his preoccupation with the proper "tendance of the soul," Plato continually ties the welfare of the soul, the individual, and the state or polis together, a theme which is not developed in early Hindu writing.

Also, philosophically, Plato, in rejecting the Monism of the Eleatics is also rejecting the Monism which undergirds much of Hinduism. A large part of his *Parmenides* is devoted to disputing the contention of the Eleatics who regarded the sense world as illusion.[52] In Plato's delineation of the three parts to the World-Soul in the *Timaeus* as Being, Sameness, and Otherness, Being is posited as intermediate between that which *is* always and that which "becomes and is divisible" in bodies.[53] In short, a particular or individual form is not separate from its universal form. Thus, the sense world to Plato is at least partly real.

Before drawing a sharp difference with the Hindus on this score, a word of caution is in order. Plato's time (428-347 B.C.) saw the rise in India of six different schools of philosophy with their frequently differing interpretations of the teachings of the *Upanishads*. The monists were represented by the schools of the *Vedanta*, and they fostered the classic interpretation of *maya* as illusion. It was the temporal, deceptive veil of creation, "a cosmic delusion which draws a veil across men's perception."[54] Salvation lay in shaking off ignorance and seeing through this veil to the Ultimate Reality. Or, as one seer put it, "the veil of *maya* is rent when it is realized that Brahma alone is real."[55] But to the *Samkhya* school (the dualists), both spirit and substance were real. The *Upanishads*, thus, did not resolve this problem by rendering a clear verdict on the nature of *maya*. Dasgupta notes that it was sometimes talked of as of an illusion and other times as ultimately real, since Brahma created *maya* out of himself, entered into it, and took on the substance of the *gunas*.[56] Fundamentally, both Plato and the Hindus held to one Ultimate Reality,[57] but as to the nature of perceived reality (the sense world), the Hindus did not speak with one voice and Plato was not always clear.

Use of Reason

Finally, perhaps the most commonly cited difference between the Orient and Occident is in the use of reason. While there is a fundamental truth to this contention, once again one must be careful to couch it correctly. To say outright that the Indians did not employ systematic reasoning in their speculations is patently false. Regarding Hindu philosophy, Walker observes :

> The instruments of thought and the laws governing reasoning are a primary study, hence the importance of logic and the need for mastering the syllogism.[58]

In fact, one of the six philosophic schools, the *Nyaya* was essentially a school of logic. Also, Buddhist philosophy became very sophisticated in its use of logic.

While F. S. C. Northrop may have been essentially correct in his assessment that Eastern thinkers have been primarily interested in investigating phenomena in their aesthetic component (where there is no distinction between object, environment, and observer) whereas Western thinkers have focused their investigations of phenomena in their theoretic component (where subject and object are separate),[59] this dichotomy of attention does not apply to Plato and many other Western thinkers with a mystical bent. And, it should be stressed, Plato was as much a father of the European intellect as Aristotle.

Furthermore, from the differences in theoretic versus aesthetic components, one should avoid the assumption that the Indians did not employ deductive reasoning. The *Nyaya* school had its syllogism, albeit rather different from the Aristotelian. The Indian one did not have a tight, three premise syllogism or make verbal distinctions between subject, predicate, and copula. Instead, its syllogistic expression employed a technique called "logical linking." The expression revolved around two terms, or data from the empirical world, contained in an hypothesis linking them to a third. The classic question of Indian logic was, "Does a hill (datum one) have fire (third term) because it smokes (datum two)?" The syllogism proceeded by a "logical linking" with other inductive examples to the original question. Originally there were ten statements to the Indian syllogism, but it was later reduced to five.[60] It was stated as follows :

1. There is fire on the mountain
2. because there is smoke above it
3. and where there is smoke there is fire as, for instance, in a kitchen;
4. such is the case with the mountain
5. and therefore there is fire on it.[61]

Despite the apparent cumbersomeness of its logic, many Western scholars who have compared Eastern and Western thought on given topics have not found the Easterners

wanting in rational sophistication. As just one illustration, Eric Voegelin comments that Rudolf Otto, in his comparison of mysticism in the East and West, concedes that the Indian, Shankara, was analytically more articulate than Meister Eckhart.[62]

Thus, in my view, while there is a fundamental difference in the use of reason between the East and the West, this difference does not lie in any contention that the East did not use deductive or inductive reasoning. Rather, it lay in the different purpose or object which the use of reason served. Starting from the mainstream Hindu view that the empirical world was an inconsequential illusion,[63] a rather natural indifference developed to questions of the material world. With truth firmly located beyond the illusory world of time and space, what need was there to verify deductive hypotheses with inductive observations ? While Plato, on the other hand, saw truth located in the world of Ideas, in the *Parmenides* and in other places he refused to abandon the notion that the world of material forms was also real. Practically, this premise led to Plato's belief that the world of the polis mattered as much as the world of the soul because they were inherently intertwined. This premise of material reality, of course, was a necessary precondition to the scientific age, and the West has been fortunate to have had a more empirically attuned Aristotle to build on the thought of Plato. India, on the other hand, went in the other direction. No one of Aristotle's stature built on the material world reality of the *Samkhya* dualists. The *Carvaka* materialists, who may have tried, were suppressed for their atheism. India's great synthesizer was Sankara (eighth century A. D.), who imposed on Hindu thought an orthodoxy of Vedantic monism and its belief in the *maya* world of illusion.

These are just a few of the differences that one can mention between Plato and the Hindus. There are certainly others. When two cultures develop from such widely separated points in the "known" world, differences are to be

expected. What is unusual, however, is the number of important similarities between Ancient Greece and Ancient India, and more particularly between Plato and the Hindus. They are such that an investigation for possible historical links and contacts is fully warranted.

Notes And References

1. Wadia, *Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle*, p. 69.
2. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 488.
3. The Hindu "trinity," or *Trimurti* as it is called, never established itself very firmly in India. The early Vedic gods were worshipped in pairs, usually representing opposing forces in nature. In the Rig-Vedic priod the gods were grouped into triads arranged around the worship of the three spheres (Sun, Heaven, and Fire, or Sun, Wind, and Fire). The *Trimurti* is first mentioned in the latest of the *Upanishads* (800-300 B. C.), the *Maitri Upanishad.* See: Troy Wilson Organ, *Hinduism : Historical Development* (Woodbury, N. J. : Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1974), pp. 97, 181-82, and Walker, *Hindu World : An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. 1, p. 395)
4. Dr David Bradley, Department of Religion, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, private interview, January 10, 1977. According to Bradley, Sanskrit and Ancient Greek linguists enjoy compiling elaborate lists of common root words between the languages as well as noting similarities in syntax and grammatical structure. To cite just two of the most common examples, the early Greek work for Zeus was "Zeus Pater," while at the same time an early hymn of the *Rig-Veda* praised a god named "Dyaush Pitar." Also, in discussing the divine aspect of one's soul, Socrates' "daemon" has a nearly identical meaning to the "atman" which was the subject of so much speculation in the *Upanishads*.
5. I say "very roughly" because while the controversy surrounding Homer's dates and authorship appears to be settled, it is still next to impossible to attach firm dates to the events of ancient India. Thanks to the evidence of archaelogical diggings at the site of Troy, Homer's city was destroyed in 1184 B. C. See: H D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth, England : Penguin Books Ltd., 1951), p. 18. The bard himself lived in the ninth century B. C. (See: ibid. p. 23.)
   In India, Kurukshetra (just outside Delhi) has been the site of many a sacred and decisive dattle. The one which the *Mahabharata* is built around is believed to have occurred in the ninth century B. C., while the events associated with the *Ramayana* are thought to have taken place "a little later." (See : Basham, p. 39.) Shortly after these events they were glorified through the oral traditions of song and ballad, and eventually compiled into the two epics. Best estimates are that the compilation of the *Mahabharata* extended from 500 B. C. to the beginning of the Christian era (see : De Bary and Ainslie, p. 63), and the *Ramayana* from the third century B. C. to the first few centuries A. D. (see : Muller p. 81). Thus, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, in oral form, were probably contemporary to Plato's dialogues.

6. Speaking of the role of the epics in India, Lin Yutang, who could have just as well been referring to the Homeric epics, observes : "The two together comprise the whole of the epic literature of the ancient Hindus ; and the two together present us with the most graphic ahd lifelike picture that exists of the civilization and culture, the political and social life, the religion and thought of ancient India. (See : Lin Yutang, P. 136)
7. Ibid., p. 135.
8. Ibid.
9. *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 44.
10. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Principal Upanishads* (New York : Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), p. 607.
11. One is a student until twenty, a householder until forty, and then, cutting all earthly ties, one becomes a wanderer or ascetic until final enlightenment. See : F. M. Mahadevan, "The Upanishads," in *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western*, vol. 1 (London : Geroge Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), p. 60. This is considered the path of knowledge. The *Bhagavad-Gita* accepts two other ways of *moksha* (salvation or enlightenment) : that of detached action and that of prayerful devotion to Lord Krishna.
12. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Francis Mac Donald Cornford (London : Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 198.
13. Ibid., p. 233.
14. Mahadevan, p. 60.

15. *Bhagavad Gita*, p. 48.
16. Lin Yutang, p. 69 (verse 35).
17. Plato, *The Republic*, pp. 127, 129.
18. Ibid., p. 107.
19. Ibid., p. 114.
20. Ibid., pp. 157-58.
21. A. E. Taylor, *Plato : The Man and His Work*, fourth edition (London : Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 265.
22. *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 142.
23. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, p. 40.
24. Azad, p. 22.
25. Walker, vol. 2, p. 424.
26. Ibid., and Dasgupta, p. 26.
27. Dasgupta, p. 61.
28. Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, translated by C. D. Yonge (London : George Bell and Sons, 1895), p. 144, and Edward J. Urwick, *The Message of Plato : A Re-interpretation of the "Republic"* (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1920), p. 28.
29. *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 28.
30. Urwick, pp. 22-23.
31. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
32. Plato, *Republic*, p. 127.
33. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, p. 623. The relevant passages cited by Radhakrishnan to illustrate his point are as follows : "*Katha Upanishad* : Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as charioteer and the mind as verily, the reins. *Republic* (IV. 433) : The just man sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and at peace with himself ; and when he has bound together the three principles within him (that is reason, emotion, and the sensual appetites) and is no longer many but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he will proceed to act, if he has to act, whether in state affairs or in private business of his own." (See : ibid.)
34. Urwick, pp. 22-23, 29.
35. Ibid., p. 39.
36. Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory : Plato and His Predecessors* (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1925), p. 188.
37. Urwick, pp. 150-51
38. *Bhagavad-Gita*, Appendix, p. 142.
39. Commenting further on the qualities of the true devotee of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Gandhi's summary of the *Gita's* twelfth chapter also speaks well for what Plato was after : "He is a devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egoism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments." (See : ibid.)
40. Taylor, p. 266.
41. *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 46.
42. Taylor, p. 186.
43. Mahadevan, p. 69.
44. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London : Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 167.
45. As Plato's myth goes : after their 1,000 year cycle is up (after approximately 100 years of earthly life and 900 years in the land of the blessed or the land of punishment), the souls come to rest at a meadow for seven days. Following this rest, they take a three day journey to a place which overlooks a pillar of light where the universe turns and the Three Fates are enthroned (Lachesis, the past ; Clotho, the present ; and Atropos, the future). Here the souls are shown the pattern of the universe and its harmony in the form of an elaborate orrery. Also at this spot a herald throws lots for the souls to choose from. The lots they select are their next lives. The herald has an inexhaustible supply of choices so that the last to choose can have his choice as readily as the first. The key point here is that each soul makes his selection based on what his previous life held to be desirable, with a fatigued Ulysses choosing a sedate lite, Orpheus that of a swan, etc., etc. Once the choices were made, Lachesis assigned each soul a Genius who was to act as the special guardian or the chosen life. Clotho then ratified each decision in turn and passed them on to Atropos who made them irrevocable. With the final choices now made, the souls all journeyed to the Plain of Forgetfulness which was intersected by the River Unmindfulness. In the evening each soul drank from this river, fell into a deep sleep forgetting the past, and at midnight was shot up like a shooting star to his new birth. (See : Urwick, pp. 204–207.)

46. Guthrie, p. 167.
47. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought* (London : Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 145.
48. Urwick, p. 90.
49. Ibid., pp. 115-45.
50. Dasgupta, p. 18.
51. Lin Yutang, p. 136.
52. Taylor, p. 551.
53. Ibid., p. 445.
54. Walker, vol. 2, p. 54.
55. Ibid.
56. Dasgupta, pp. 48-49.
57. Even the *Samkhya* dualists subscribed to one Ultimate Reality spiritually in the sense that the goal of the spirit (*purusha),* the soul or the self, was to escape from matter or substance (*prakriti*) and each become a separate spirit.
58. Walker, vol. 2, p. 202.
59. Northrop, pp. 375, 394-98.
60. Walker, vol, 2, p. 471.
61. Basham, p, 501.
62. Voegelin, vol. 4, p. 321,
63. Agan, the *Samkhya* dualists, who accepted the reality of the empirical world of substance (*prakriti*), still felt the spiritual essence or soul was the more important and sought only to have their souls escape from the world of substance.

Chapter—III
THE EVIDENCE
Historical

Early Evidence

The weight of effort in this chapter, quite candidly, will be to try to demonstrate the likelihood of historical links between the Greeks and the Indians. As in the previous chapter, however, disclaimers to this possibility will be acknowledged at the end.

Following in chronological sequence, this historicity campaign will first consider some of the earliest evidence of, knowledge of, and intercourse between, India and Greece ; namely, Homer, Babylon, and the ancient trade routes. With the advent of the Persian Empire, history becomes clearer. Hence, secondly, the penetration of this Empire by both Indians and Greeks will be noted as well as the opportunities for contact that were especially occasioned by the Persian Wars with Greece (490 and 481-479 B.C.). Here the unique service of Herodotus' *Histories* will be acknowledged. With the Persian Empire surveyed, attention will be turned, thirdly, to the Athens of Plato's day, which shall be depicted as an open, cosmopolitan city befitting the capital of a maritime empire—and perhaps even hosting a dialogue between Socrates and a coterie of travelling Brahmin seers. Next some specific developments will be briefly mentioned which *have* come out of an ancient interchange between the two cultures. Even if this interchange is accepted, the question of its direction remains controversial. However, one example will be briefly noted where the direction was clearly from East to West : the odyssey of the Indian beast fable.

With the case for the link thus presented, the disclaimers will focus upon the lack of evidence for any *direct* connection,

the failure of the Greeks to improve their knowledge of India (in spite of, and perhaps because of Herodotus), and the concomitant dimness of Indian awareness of Greece. With the evidence all in, this chapter will conclude by noting what Plato himself said—or did not say—about the Indians.

To begin, Homeric Greece, from some source or other, was dimly aware of India. Homer spoke of two races of "Ethiopians," the western (the Africans) and the eastern (presumably the Indians) who were connected by a land bridge. Thus Herodotus used the word "Ethiopian" for what were probably the Dravidian people of India.[1]

Perhaps this "awareness" stemmed from trade. Trade between India and the Tigress-Euphrates Rivers was very ancient. Via cuneiform inscriptions of the Hittite kings, it can be traced back as far as the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries B.C.[2] From this early intercourse, commerce expanded until by the fall of Babylon (538 B. C.) goods from India reached the West over three trade routes. The first was an extension of the ancient Mesopotamian link to Antioch. A second over-land route reached Antioch through the mountain passes of North-West India. Finally, Indian wares reached the Suez by a maritime route across the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea. This route was no meager accomplishment in its day and attested to a vigorous sea-faring tradition in India.[3] From all these routes, products which reached Greece of Indian origin were tin, ivory, rice, cinnamon, ginger, pepper, and beryl-stone.[4]

Before the advent of the Persian Empire, Babylon was one of the centers of this trade and became the queen city of Western Asia. There the ancient world met to trade and barter their goods : Ionian Greeks, Jewish captives, Phoenician merchants, and Indians from the Punjab. As the third century B. C. Chaldean historian, Berosus, noted of this period, "At Babylon there was a great resort of people of various races who inhabited Chaldes and lived in a lawless fashion."[5] Thus, at least at Bayblon, the Indian and Greek met to discuss, if not philosophy, the price of cinnamon.

Persian Empire

This early contact was greatly expanded with the arrival of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Under Darius I (522-486 B.C.) the empire extended from India to the Aegean. The Persians consolidated this domain by building a transportation network (including a canal at Suez) for trade, communication, and control which was unrivalled until the Roman Empire.[6] A Persian inscription of 519 B.C. declared that Darius I claimed "Hindush." In point of fact, he only controlled Sind and parts of the Punjab (in modern Pakistan), but the Persian expansion into the subcontinent, Basham remarks, acquainted the people of Magadha with the possibilities and techniques of political expansion and inspired the establishment of Magadhan control over most of the Indo - Gangetic plain.[7]

It was also through the Persians that the Greeks began to get a clearer picture of India. In 600 B.C. Cyrus brought Greece closer to the East by conquering Ionia[8] at the same time that Thales (c. 625-546 B.C.), an Ionian, was propounding the thought which earned him the title of the Father of Greek Philosophy.[9] How much Thales availed himself of this increased opportunity for Eastern contact is a matter of speculation. However, in this regard it is interesting to note that most Ionian settlements were originally Athenian colonies, and Athens always displayed a keen and almost maternal interest in Ionian affairs.[10] Consequently, as a result of these Ionian ties, the Athenians were apt to follow developments in Persia far more losely than their sister Greek city-states.

A bit more concretely, the Persian monarchs acquired the habit of employing Greek mercenaries to provide a little backbone to their huge contingents of tribute-supplied troops (including ones from India). Darius I's Admiral, Skylax, was one such mercenary who was sent on an expedition to India. He set out in 517 B. C., reached India, sailed down the Indus River, and returned via the Red Sea becoming the first Greek of record to have been to both places. Doubtless drawing on Skylax, the Greek geographer Hekataeus, a sixth century B. C.

contemporary, was the first Greek in turn to refer to India by that name and to list some of its principal cities.[11]

The Classical Greeks owed much of their knowledge of India and even of the Persian Empire to the *Histories* of Herodotus (484-425 B.C.). He was born in Kalikarnassus near Karyanda, the home of Skylax (both places were in Ionia), whose lost narrative he must surely have relied on for much of his Indian account.[12] Herodotus was partial to Athens and is reported to have given a public reading of parts of his *Histories* in Athens in 446 B. C., for which he was awarded ten talents.[13] It would somehow seem inconceivable that Socrates (c. 470 or 469-400 or 399 B.C.), who was an intellectually active young man, did not hear this reading.

The picture of Persia which emerges from Herodotus is one of an empire thoroughly permeated with both Indians and Greeks. Listing the contributions of the twenty Persian provinces, he says this about the last one ;

> Twentieth : the Indians, the most populous nation in the known world, paid the largest sum : 360 talents of gold-dust.[14]

Herodotus calculated that this yearly 360 talents was the equivalent of 4,680 Greek talents and that the total annual revenues of the Persian Empire was 14,560 talents.[15] In addition, the Indians sent to Persepolis a light division of infantry. During the Persian Wars, Indian troops formed a part of Xerxes' army which won a bloody victory at Thermopylae (480 B.C.).[16] Also, Indian contingents of cavalry were among the picked troops who stayed behind in Greece with the Persian general Mardonius (following Xerxes' withdrawal) and shared in his fatal defeat at Platea (479 B.C.).[17]

Greeks figured very prominently in the Persian Empire as well. Mention has already been made of the liberal use of Greek mercenaries by Persian rulers. At the battle of Platea, Herodotus reports that of Mardonius' 300,000 troops, 50,000 were Greeks. [18] Ironically, this put Indians and Greeks fighting side by side against other Greeks. With the high value placed on Greek soldiers as a springboard, many Greeks rose to high

political positions within the empire. Xerxes' Chief Eunuch was the treacherous Greek Hermotimus (so-described by Herodotus),[19] and Xenagoras, who was a native of Herodotus' Halikarnassus, was made governor of a province in Asia Minor.[20]

Hence, through the medium of the Persian Empire, Indian and Greeks came into increasing contact, and presumably found a need to talk about politics, government and war, in addition to the price of cinnamon. Meanwhile some Indians, in the aftermath of the Persian Wars, were no doubt acquiring some first-hand experienee of Athens at least as slaves in the bottom of its silver mines.[21]

Cosmopolitan Athens

Above ground, in the marketplaces of the city and at the harbor in nearby Piraeus, the Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. was the center of a thriving international trade and commerce that made it a cosmopolitan city far surpassing the Babylon of the sixth century B.C. This commerce was the very lifeblood of the city and most of it was handled by its *metic* population (resident aliens), who were mainly non-Attic Greeks but included other merchant peoples as well. As a class they were well-treated and evidently associated quite freely with the citizen class.[22] If the assumption that the interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues were real people is accepted (and many have been identified from independent sources), Plato and Socrates were two of these citizens who had *metic* friends. *The Republic*, for example, takes place in the home of Cephalus, a wealthy retired manufacturer who was an alien.[23]

Part of Athens' reputation as an exciting city must have been due to this social mobility. Until 450 B.C., when a conservative reaction set in against this "excessive" openness, *metics* could become citizens. In fact, until this same date, even slaves could become citizens. Numbering around 80,000 in the fifth century B.C., slaves were ubiquitous in Athens. They worked in a variety of occupations but divided into a class of skilled craftsmen and one of unskilled laborers, the

most wretched of whom were the 20,000 in the silver mines. In addition to the privately owned slaves, there were also slaves owned by the government who served as bureaucratic clerks and even as policemen.[24] In Athens slaves were paid wages and could either buy their freedom with their master's consent or be manumitted outright. The example of Pasion, who rose from slavery to become one of Athen's leading citizens and most wealthy bankers, was unusual but not entirely unique.[25] It is probable, however, given the Greek attitudes towards barbarians, that fortune smiled far more sweetly on those *metics* and slaves who were Greek.

Whatever the prejudices of fortune, the important question remains, what was the likelihood of either Socrates or Plato coming into contact with Indian thought possibly even through a direct meeting and discourse? Xenophon in his *Memorabilia* depicts Socrates as a man roaming the streets of Athens talking with anyone who would stop to listen, and, in turn, listening to the tales of soldiers, generals, administrators, and statesmen. It is the picture of a man at the very center of Athenian life.[26] Thus, if there were any Indians in Athens, and it does not seem unreasonable to assume that there were at least some, then even a direct meeting and discourse between Plato and/or Socrates and some philosophically attuned Indian, either a travelling trader or a freedman who might have been an ex-cavalry officer and from the twice-born *Kshatriya* caste, cannot be ruled out as impossible.

In fact, in the context of the Athens of the late fifth century B. C. and with the impressions that have been handed down about the character and personality of Socrates, Eusebius' account of a meeting between Socrates and a coterie of visiting Brahmin seers in 430 B. C. does not even seem fanciful. In his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (XI. 3) written in 315 A.D. he recites the following tale of Aristoxenus, who was one of Aristotle's pupils and who wrote around 320 B. C.:

> Aristoxenus the musician tells the following story about the Indians. One of these men met Socrates at Athens, and asked him what was the scope of his philosophy. "An inquiry into human phenomena," replied Socrates. At this point the Indian burst out laughing. "How can we inquire into human phenomena," he exclaimed, "when we are ignorant of divine ones?"[27]

If Aristoxenus can be accepted as reliable, the chain linking the *Upanishads* to Socrates and Plato can be firmly completed. Unfortunately, he has the reputation of being a liar. A. E. Taylor refers to him as, "a scholar of Aristotle who was a singularly mendacious person."[28] For example, he states unequivocally that Pythagoras was a disciple of Zoroaster, the Persian seer.[29] With Aristoxenus' reputation, this assertion cannot be accepted on its own merits because it is difficult to conclusively bracket the two men in the same time period. Radhakrishnan, speaking for many Eastern scholars, reports Zoroaster as living around 1,000 B.C. while Pythagoras was solidly from the *sixth* century B.C. (c.582-506 B.C.).[30] However, Western scholarship while conceding that certainty is impossible, has accepted Herzefeld's arguments that Zoroaster lived from 570-500 B. C.,[31] which would make an association between the two men chronologically possible and fit in with the accounts of Pythagoras' wide travels. Furthermore, Aristoxenus' comments on the beliefs of Zorastrianism were quite accurate.[32] Some more recent scholars, recognizing this, are less inclined to be skeptical of Aristoxenus and other Pythagorean disciples. Winspear, for example, sees no reason to doubt him when he represents his work, *Elements of Harmony*, as derived from the oral tradition of the Pythagorean school.[33] In short, the man is a puzzle. Thus, although Aristoxenus' tale may just be a tale, it recounts an incident that might just have happened nevertheless.

General Links Between India and Greece

Whether or not in philosophy, there is clear evidence that some developments did occur as a result of a link between India and Greece. Although the following discussion of scientific developments and the migration of Indian fables may be regarded as a digression, since these movements did not take place strictly before the watershed of Alexander's invasion, they

do, nonetheless, illustrate a process of sharing that may well have been going on for a long time.

The clearest acknowledgement of this sharing lies in astronomy. The *Gargi Samhita*, a Sanskrit text (written c. 230 A. D.), specifically concedes :

> The Yavanas (Greeks) are barbarians, yet the science of astronomy originated with them, and for this they must be reverenced like gods.[34]

Basham delineates some of these Greek contributions as the signs of the zodiac, the seven-day week, the hour, as well as many technical terms. The Indians, in turn, made several advances on the Greeks, particularly in mathematics, and passed these advances back to Europe through the Arabs.[35] He also remarks that the development of medicine in India probably made great strides as a result of contact with Hellenic physicians, but that the over-all similarities between the classical medicine of both India and Greece suggest a borrowing on both sides.[36]

If some version of a link between the ancient worlds of India and Greece can be accepted, the question of the direction of these influences remains open. In the case of philosophy, if there was such an influence, the direction seems quite clearly to be from India to Greece. While the *Bhagavad-Gita* was written after Plato, or at roughly the same time, the essentials of Hindu philosophy contained in the *Upanishads* were set down even before the birth of Greek philosophy with Thales. In the face of this, Rawlinson is surprised to note that no less an authority than Burnett still contends that, "everything points to the conclusion that Indian philosophy came from Greece."[37] Although this study also finds this remark to be incredible and is investigating the implications of the opposite possibility of Indian philosophic influenee on Plato, the acceptance of some link regardless of direction is at least a first step. This question of philosophic direction will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter.

One example where the original direction was quite clearly from East to West was the growth of the beast-fable, the claims of Aesop notwithstanding. Aesop stands alone in Greece

whereas in India beast-fables abound in the *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesa*, *Jatakas*, and *Dhammapada Commentary*.[38] The earliest ones, the *Panchatantra*, were put down in writing in Kashmir in the second century B.C., but from their appearances in earlier Sanskrit works the stories themselves are much older.[39] Max Muller, the distinguished German Orientalist, believed they came to Greece from India in Herodotus' time.[40] While others have clung to a belief in a Greek or at least an independent origin of the fables, the following series of comments quoted by Lin Yutang deal telling blows to this position :

> [As an introduction, Rhys Davids argues :] We have to admit that the beast-fable did not begin with him (Aesop), or in Greece at all. We have in fact, to go East and to look to India...to get an idea how old the antiquity of the fable actually is...
>
> [The reason for this assertion is provided by Rawlinson:] That the migration of fables was originally from East to West, and not vice versa, is shown by the fact that the animals and birds who play the leading parts, the lion, the jackal, the elephant and the peacock are mostly Indian ones...
>
> [A bit more pointedly, Lin Yutang observes :] Tigers, monkeys, and crocodiles abound in Indian jungles and not in Greece.[41]

To recapitulate for a moment, thus far in this chapter I have sought to demonstrate the possibility and even the likelihood of a link or a bridge between India and Greece across which Upanishadic philosophy may have travelled to Plato. This was done by first noting the earliest sources of Greek knowledge of India. Secondly, in looking at the Persian Empire, the key role of both Indians and Greeks in this kingdom was highlighted to demonstrate the inevitability of fairly high-level contacts between the two. This inevitability was brought physically closer to Greece by the engagements of the Persian Wars, and the resultant likelihood of some Indians actually settling in Athens, at least as slaves. In fact, the possibility of a direct dialogue between Brahmin seers and Socrates was even

discussed. Finally, as "empirical" examples of the use of this bridge, mention was made of the early scientific interchanges between the two countries as well as the travel of the Indian fable to Europe.

This does not mean that, in regard to Indian influence on Greek thought in general and Plato's thought in particular, all the difficulties have been cleared up by the mere availability of a bridge. There remains the question of how extensively it was used.

Disclaimers

To begin the disclaimers, despite the arguments set forth above, definitive proof of *direct* contact between India and Greece is lacking. As Rawlinson argues :

> The intercourse between India and Greece, before the days of Alexander, was of an indirect nature...Indian traders themselves never went further than Babylon or the mouth of the Red Sea. Greece had no direct communication with India ...Of the great civilization of ancient India, its philosophy and religion, Greece knew—and cared—nothing...They looked on them all as Barbarians ...It is extraordinary how little they found out about even their near neighbors, the Persians.[42]

Aside from over-reaching himself in the last remark about the Persians, Rawlinson's indictment has its cogency. This is especially true when one considers the fact that the knowledge of India by Alexander's time (356-323 B. C.) was as dim as it was in Homer's day before. The playwright Aeschylus of the mid-fifth century B.C., whom Plato quoted frequently, for example, knew vaguely about India, but still believed there was a land connection between India and Ethiopia, in spite of the voyage of Skylax.[43] Also, Xenophon, who marched with the famous 10,000 Greek mercenaries as far as Ecbatana in the heart of the Persian Empire, knew very little of the eastern part of the empire and nothing about India.[44] By the mid-fourth century B.C. (the time of Plato's death) and the rise of Alexander, the Persian Empire had lost its Indian possessions reported by Herodotus, whose *Histories* was by then seldom read. Thus, the Indians were as shadowy to the fourth century B. C. Greek as the Celts are to the twentieth century modern.[45]

To further complicate the task of the historian, the Classical Greeks continually confused Egypt and India. The Greeks, particularly Plato, felt indebted to the Egyptians, but their interpretation of what was Egyptian was indiscriminate. Megasthenes, who was Seleucus Nikator's Ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya (third century B. C.), reported that there were seven castes to India's caste system. In this he was led astray by Herodotus who, in some confusion, wrote that Egypt had seven castes.[46] While Egypt may have had seven social classes, it did not have a formal caste system like India's.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Indian knowledge of Greece was equally sketchy. That Alexander and his exploits make up one of the most dashing sagas of European history does not mean he took the consciousness of India by storm as well. In fact, as Basham observes, "Alexander made so small an impression upon India that in the whole of her surviving ancient literature there is no reference to him."[47] This is not to say that the Greeks had no impact on India at all, but Basham's observation should serve as a warning against exaggerating its extent.

With the evidence for and against the existence and use of a bridge or link between India and Greece before us, perhaps the best way to determine Plato's use or non-use of this connection is to sift through what he himself actually did—or did not —say.

What Plato Said—And Did Not Say

This brief section which follows will note Plato's general attitude towards foreigners and something of the extent of his knowledge of the barbarian world.

Plato was one Greek who appreciated the value and potential contributions of foreigners. Many of the interlocutors mentioned in his dialogues are resident aliens.[48] In Book XII of the *Laws*, he calls for special inducements to bring in respon-

sible foreign visitors in order either to impart or to acquire lessons in true statesmanship.[49] Continuing in this vein, in the *Epinomus* he argues in favor of borrowing from the barbarians, but with the admonition that the Greeks should always improve on this borrowing.[50] Although Plato's foreign travels were not extensive, to Sicily in connection with his adventures and misadventures in practical politics and also reportedly to Egypt, they were apparently enough to convince him that Greece was not the fount of all wisdom.

Scattered throughout his dialogues is evidence that Plato's vast intellect included information about the barbarian world. The countries he knew best (aside from Sicily) were Egypt and Persia. In the *Phaedrus* he tells a myth about the origin of writing in Egypt in which are figured the two Egyptian gods Amon and Thoth.[51] Plato seems also to have picked up an acquaintance with Egyptian art. In the *Laws* he makes several comments on the subject.[52] Indeed his remarks on both religion and art reinforce the reports that Plato may actually have visited Egypt. Once again in the *Laws*, in setting up his system of education (one of his special preoccupations), he says that the children should be as proficient in arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy as the Egyptians.[53]

Plato's knowledge of the Persian Empire, particulary of its political system, was also quite competent. This knowledge he may well have picked up second-hand from Greek mercenaries who fought in Persia. According to A. E. Taylor, his dialogue *Meno* is named after one such mercenary who fought on the side of Cyrus and against Xenophon at the Battle of Cunaxa in 401 B. C.[54] The *Alcibiades* depicts Plato describing with some enthusiasm the whole Persian system of training which produced a man of Cyrus' caliber with its emphasis on riding, archery, and speaking the truth.[55] Since Plato scholars are not settled on the authenticity of this dialogue, the same display of knowledge about Persia can be found in Book III of the *Laws*. However, here the purpose is a bit different. In pressing for the advantages of a mixed constitution, he brings out the flaws

of the Persian political system to demonstrate the dangers of autocratic rule.[56]

In addition to his familiarity with Egypt and Persia, Plato also mentions Carthage, Thrace, Syria, and Scythia. His knowledge of Carthage was doubtless far more thorough than the few references he makes to it in the *Laws*. Its commerce was important to the Greeks. And in Sicily the Carthaginians, who ruled half the island, were an integral part of the political equation with which he had to deal.[57] From Thrace, Plato recounts in the *Charmides* Socrates' prescription for Charmides' fever, a cure which he learned from a Thracian while on a northern campaign.[58] In probably the only explicit acknowledgement of a barbarian source by Plato, in the *Epinamus*, while detailing the contents of the Noctural Council's scientific education, he admits that the nomenclature of the plants and stars come from the Syrians.[59] Finally, regarding the Scythians, Plato reveals a knowledge of their military tactics in the *Laches*.[60] He was also a great admirer of their ambidexterity and decided in the *Laws* that all Greek school children should learn how to become ambidextrous.[61]

In this listing there is one conspicuous absence, India. Rawlinson puts it succintly, "Plato never mentions Indian philosophy, or India at all, in his writings."[62] The implication is obvious : if Plato, as one of the most highly educated men of his day, had time to notice the ambidexterity of the Scythians and the stories of Egyptian gods, surely, if he had any exposure to the rather more profound thoughts of Upanishadic philosophy at all, he would have taken the time to discuss or at least mention it.

Under "normal" circumstances Plato's silence on India would confirm his ignorance. But "normal" circumstances cannot be assumed for Classical Greece because such writers as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Plato had a habit of not acknowledging their sources. This practice has left historians with insoluble puzzles. Plato, for example, may well have based entire dialogues, such as the *Timaeus* or the *Phaedo*, on a discussion of Upanishadic metaphysics, or he may

have written them completely unaware of any similar ideas being expressed in India in spite of all the coincidences detailed in Chapter Two. His silence on sources inevitably leaves the issue unresolved.

Lest this study be overwhelmed by pessimism on this score, Plato's silence notwithstanding, thre is a ray of light. Although Plato said nothing of India, his pupil Aristotle did. In Book VII of the *Politics*, he observed :

> We have nothing in actual life like the gulf between kings and subjects which the writer Scylax describes as existing in India.[63]

Thus, whatever dimness may have developed over India, the Skylax account retained its intellectual currency at least among intellectuals like Aristotle, and, as Aristotle's predecessor, it would be unusual to assume that Plato's Academy did nothing to pass on this account.

Another somewhat more circuitous avenue where Hindu influence on Plato might be traced is through the Pythagoreans and the Orphic Mysteries which clearly did play a role in molding Plato's philosophy.

Notes And References

1. H. G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse Between India and the Western World* (London : Cambridge University Press, 1926), p.p. 18-19. This Greek belief in a land bridge between Africa and India (the two "Ethiopias") persisted until well after the time of Alexander.

2. Ibid., p. 2.

3. Ibid., pp. 1-15. For an excellent discussion of this sea-faring tradition and the remarkable nautical skills of the Indian mariners, Rawlinson commends : Mukerji, *Indian Shippiug* (London : Longmans Press, 1912), esp. Ch. 3.

4. Ibid., pp. 14-15.

5. Ibid., p. 7.

6. Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition,* translated with an Introduction and Notes by Rex Werner (Harmondsworth, England : Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 33 (Introduction).

7. Basham, p. 47, and W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1956), p. 86. Persian inscriptions do not begin mentioning Indians until 510 B. C. which, thus, may be taken as the effective date of the Persian occupation of the Punjab. (See : Rawlinson, p. 17.)

8. M. N. Dhalla, "Persian Thought : Historical Introduction," in *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western*, vol. 2, p. 12,

9. Ibid. p. 28.

10. For example, in a debate over the future of Ionia after the Persian attacks in 479 B. C., Herodotus reports that the Athenians were indignant over Peloponnessian proposals to remove the Ionian colonies. The indignation stemmed from the longstanding Athenian conviction that these colonies were Athenian, and consequently, their disposition was a matter solely between the Athenians and the Ionians. (See : Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by Aubrey Selincourt, and revised, with an Introduction and Notes, by A. R. Burn (Harmondsworth, England : Penguin Books Ltd ; 1972), p. 618 (Book IX).

11. Rawlinson, pp. 16-19.

12. Ibid., pp. 21-24. Controversy has always swirled around the reliability of Herodotus' *Histories*. His uncritical acceptance of some very fanciful tales (such as the ants-as-big-as-foxes in India) and continual exaggeration of the size of Persian forces does not help his case. Still he is generally true to his events, and the warmth of his personality, with all his prejudices shines through to give his account the priceless ring of the contemporary observer. With a proper amount of scholarly caution, it remains an invaluable primary source of Greek history. (For substantially the same opinion, see : ibid.)

13. Herodotus, p. 1 (Introduction).

14. Ibid , p. 244 (Book III).

15 Rawlinson notes that this 360 talents of gold dust weighed 20, 736 pounds (See : Rawlinson, p. 18). At $ 150 an ounce this puts the annual Indian tribute at 49. 7 million. W. W. Tarn takes strong exception to this large tribute in gold dust, saying that such a contribution was vastly disproportionate and far beyond India's means. He points out that the only Indian tribute recorded on inscriptions were ivory and yaka wood. (See : W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (London : Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 106-08. However, for Tarn to reduce the Indian role in the Persian Empire to the mere contributors of ivory and yaka wood appears equally disproportionate. For example, he makes no mention of the substantial Indian military tribute.

16. Rawlinson, p. 18.

17. Herodotus, p. 562 (Book VIII).

18. Ibid., p. 590 (Book IX).
19. Ibid., p. 55. (Book VIII).
20. Ibid., p. 619 (Book IX).
21. Indians, it has been remarked, remained behind with Mardonius' army of 300,000. At the final Battle of Platea, the Indians are listed by Herodotus as occupying a principal position along the Persian front lines. Following the collapse of the Persian front, Herodotus mentions that its cavalry was one of the groups which made it back to the wooden fortifications of the Persian base camp. Since one of the two Indian contingents mentioned was a cavalry unit, some of them must have been among those who made it. After the massacre, following the Athenian break-through into this fortification, he reports that there were only 3,000 survivors. (See : ibid., pp. 589-605 (Book IX).) It is perhaps not too presumptuous to assume that some Indians were numbered among these survivors, and were shipped off to Athens as slaves. Besides this contingent, others were likely to have been picked up from among the many wounded and scattered troops left behind after the various engagements of the campaign.

In fact, most Athenian slaves were procured from the ranks of war prisoners. Although the majority of these slaves were fellow Greeks, lists drawn from several accounts suggest that representatives from nearly all nationalities were numbered among the slaves of Athens : Thracians, Syrians, Scythians, Illyrians, Phrygians, Lydians, and "other Asiatics." (See Barker, p. 33; W. W. Tarn, *Hellenic Civilization* (London : Edward Arnold and Co., 1927), p. 90; and La Rue Van Hook, *Greek Life and Thought : A Portrayal of Greek Civilization* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1923), p. 106. Thus, given the primary source of its slaves, it is more than likely that a number of Indians became a part of Athenian society, as slaves, after the Persian Wars.

22. T. B. L Webster, *Athenian Culture and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal. : University of California Press, 1973), pp. 257 ff.
23. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth, England : Penguin Books Ltd., 1951), p. 236. Just as Socrates was an historical figure, so apparently were many of the interlocutors in Plato's dialogues. In addition to some of the figures being described in sufficient detail to be confirmed by independent sources, Plato confirmed the practice of using real people in his dialogues in his Thirteenth Letter (363a) : "The name of Kebes is familiar to you; for he is represented in the Sokratic [sic] dialogues as speaking to Sokrates along with Simmias in the discussion about the soul, and is a friend and well-wisher to us all." (See : Plato, *The Platonic Epistles*, pp. 160-61.)

24. Barker, p. 33.
25. Webster, p. 258.
26. Wadia, "Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle," p. 47.
27. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 151.
28. Taylor, p. xiii.
29. Dhalla, p. 11.
30. Ibid., p. 33.
31. Ernest Herzefeld, *Zoroaster and His World*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 27.
32. Dhalla, p. 16.
33. Alban Dewis Winspear, *The Genesis af Plato's Thought*, second edition (New York ; S. A. Russell, 1956), p. 80.
34. Rawlinson, p. 173.
35. Basham, pp, 490-91.
36. Ibid., p, 499.
37. Rawlinson, p. 159.
38. Lin Yutang, p. 267.
39. Ibid., p. 26.
40. Ibid., p. 266.
41. Ibid., pp. 265, 267. It should be remembered that the original works of the Classical Age were lost to the Europe of the "Dark Ages," and were only rediscovered through the largely unacknowledged help of the Arabs. The second odyssey of the Indian fables to Europe makes an interesting tale and is illustrative of the largely unnoticed Indian impact on European folkways. As described by Max Muller : they were first translated from Sanskrit into Persian in the sixth century A.D. From Persian they were translated into Syriac in 570 A.D., and into Arabic in the eighth century as the *Fables of Pilpay*. From this Arabic rendition they spread throughout the Islamic world and reached Eastern Europe and were translated into Greek, Latin German, Italian, and English. La Fontaine in his 1678 *Fables* acknowledges the source of his tales in the Preface, "I owe the largest portion of them to Pilpay the Indian Sage." (See : ibid., p. 266.)

As a further indication of the extent of European folk tales stemming from "Pilpay," H. G. Rawlinson notes that many of the fairy tales in Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson can be traced to Indian sources, including "The Magic Mirror," "The Seven-Leagued Boots," " Jack and the Bean Stalk," and "The Purse of Fortunatus." He further observes that many Indian fables are to be found in the *Gesta Romanorum*, the *Decameron*, and the *Canterbury Tales* (See : Ibid., p. 6.).

In the course of their westward journey some of these tales became somewhat transformed. One of the most interesting is the romance of "Balaam and Josaphat" which is quite plainly the story of Buddha, changed into Christian garb, and later canonized as St. Josaphat. Perhaps the most popular of these "transformed" stories is the one about the milkmaid who dreamt of her wedding and overthrew her pail of milk, which was originally the story of "Brahman's Dream" from the *Panchatantra*. (See : ibid.)

42. Rawlinson, p. 155.
43. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, p. 85.
44. Xenophon, p. 30 (Introduction),
45. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, p. 85.
46. Rawlinson, p. 50.
47. Basham, p. 50.
48. See n. 23 above.
49. Taylor, p. 496.
50. Ibid., p. 500.
51. Ibid., p. 316.
52. Ibid., p. 469.
53. Ibid., p. 485.
54. Ibid., p. 129.
55. Wadia, "Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle," p. 58.
56. Taylor, p. 471.
57. Ibid , p. 266.
58. Ibid., p. 49.
59. Ibid., p. 500.
60. Ibid., p 60.
61. Ibid., p. 482.
62. Rawlinson, p. 157.
63. Aristotle, *The Politics*, edited and translated by Ernest Barker (London : Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 315.

CHAPTER—IV

THE PYTHAGOREAN—ORPHIC BRIDGE

The Orphics

IN THIS chapter's attempt to trace Hindu influence on Plato through the Pythagoreans and the Orphics, the plan of attack will be to first describe the principal teachings of both groups. Then I shall review the candidacies of various countries as sources for these beliefs. In this connection, I shall concentrate on the origin of the doctrine of reincarnation or metempsychosis, since it is chiefly on this doctrine, I shall argue, that a case for Indian influence on Plato can be based, via the Pythagoreans and the Orphics—and probably the former more than the latter. Plato's (and Socrates')[1] very clear association with, and indebtedness to, the Pythagoreans and Orphics shall round out the discussion before concluding the chapter with some comments on the value of these two groups as a link between the Hindus and Plato.

At the outset, it must be recognized that in dealing with the Pythagoreans and the Orphics, one enters very murky waters. Little is directly known of Pythagoras' teachings. They survive through disconnected fragments and through the interpretations and interpolations of his students and disciples, who became quickly riven by factions after the master's death. This subsequent sectarianism has sullied any chance of recovering a pure version of Pythagoras. For different reasons but with much the same effect, the Orphic and other mysteries were privy only to their own initiates and kept completely secret from the general public. Through the centuries they have done a remarkable job of preserving them for what they were at the beginning, mysteries. Thus, although this paper attempts to

separate the Pythagoreans and the Orphics somewhat, they have always been closely associated and the distinctions made here should not be taken too rigidly. Furthermore, as will be discussed shortly, the Indians did not hold to one path or view of reincarnation either.

Turning our attention first to the Orphics, the Eleusinian Mysteries grew out of the community initiation ceremonies which were a phenomenon in Greece pre-dating the establishment of the city-states (and hence prior to 600 B.C.). Originally their purpose was to bring in new members to the life-cycle of birth and death, planting and harvesting, that tied the community or tribe to the natural processes and cycles which they depended on, and which they as initiates became a part of. The ceremonies near Athens took place on the fields of Eleusis. When Athens took over these fields in 600 B.C., the ceremonies became a rite of initiation for all Athenians. However, the fields were an inconvenient day's journey from the city (twelve miles), and, with the decline in the importance of agricultural-based religion, the rite became optional. Nevertheless, the mysteries remained popular throughout the Classic and Hellenic periods.[2]

Out of these mysteries, for those who desired a deeper and more personal revelation of these divine secrets, grew the Orphic Mysteries. These mysteries, with the Thracian Orpheus as their "patron saint," stemmed from the shamanistic cults of Thrace.[3] The goal of their initiation ceremonies was more than just to incorporate the initiates into the life of the community; it was to lift them out of their delusions of individuality to a feeling of unity with God. First, they descended into dimly-lit caverns which suggested Hades. In the next stage they climbed to an upper chamber resplendent with light to represent the Abode of the Blessed. Finally, they were shown the holy objects and icons which until this climactic moment had been concealed. These revelations were supposed to induce ecstasy in which the initiates were lifted out of their individualities and overcome by a feeling of the unity of God, the oneness of God and the soul, and their absorption into this oneness.[4]

Their beliefs centered around their view of the soul and of its transmigration to the Abode of the Gods. The body was regarded as a husk around the soul and, owing to the soul's sins, acted as a prison keeping it from its divine nature.[5] To escape from this corporeal prison, the Orphics believed the soul could return to its original state as a perfected divinity through a cycle of births and rebirths, and escape from this chain of reincarnation by leading progressively purer lives free from sin.[6] Ultimately, rebirth is broken by reminiscence. As described by an Orphic plate unearthed from the archaelogical excavations at Thurii, reminiscence is the realization or remembrance of the soul of its divine origins as well as an appreciation for the hazards it will encounter in its long journey back to the gods based on a knowledge of the trials of previous lives.[7] According to Pindar, the minimum length of the journey for the Orphics as well as for Plato was three pious lives in a row.[8] In Plato's scheme, of course, a pious life was the same as the life of a true philosopher.

The Pythagoreans

Pythagoras (c. 582-506 B. C.), who was a contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira in India and of Confucius and Lao Tzu in China, was from the Ionian Greek island of Samos just off the coast of Asia Minor. However, he propounded and practiced most of his philosophy in the Greek city of Krotona in South Italy, and hence has been called, by Diogenes Laertius among others, the father of the Italian School of Greek philosophy.[9] He had a reputation for being well-travelled. Diogenes Laertius, who wrote in the second century A.D., reports that he went to Egypt, learned its language, and was allowed to enter the holiest parts of the Egyptian temples. According to Laertius, Pythagoras also associated with the Chaldeans and the famed Persian magi as well as undertaking a journey to Crete where he descended into the Idean Caves and learned their secret mysteries.[10] Some accounts have him wandering as far as the Middle-East, Arabia, and India.[11] Iamblichus

(c. 300) reports that he was imprisoned in Egypt and carried off to Babylon.[12] How reliable all these accounts are is another question.

From what can be reconstructed, there appear to have been two strands to Pythagoras' thought : the mathematical and the religious. In the mathematical sphere, he made great advances in geometry with the discovery of his Pythagorean Theorem. Laertius said that he carried geometry to perfection.[13] In the course of his mathematical speculations, he discovered the fact of a "hidden" mathematical order to sound. His examination of Greek music revealed that its basic intervals were expressed in fixed numerical proportions. With this knowledge he was able to locate the harmonic "mean" between two tones. This led Pythagoras to his notion of the harmony of the spheres and his belief in a harmony of the cosmos based on numbers.[14] Plato, in his Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*, gives some prominence to a demonstration of this harmony of the spheres.

This idea of harmony in arithmetic relationships became an essential part of Pythagoras' conception of the soul. He divided the soul into three parts : feeling, intuition, and reason. The goal of the soul, as for the Orphics, was to gain release from the chain of reincarnation which originally brought it down to earth. His method was through virtue which would result in a harmony of the soul within itself and with God.[15] In addition, like the Orphics, Pythagoras stressed reminiscence as a key mark of virtue. He made a point of remembering his previous lives, and is reported by Laertius as delivering speeches about them.[16]

However, Pythagoras' scheme of reincarnation seems to have been more similar to Hindu thought than to Orphic. He did not talk about the soul having once been a god and returning to its original state of dtvinity. Rather he talked about the soul's eventual absorption into the cosmic reality according to laws of virtue which, in many respects, resembled the Hindu law of *karman*. Also, like the Hindus, the journey was much longer. Pythagoras spoke of the soul's wandering through

countless lives, even as animals and plants, in its quest for release.

From this followed other teachings which had their parallels in India. For example, to cultivate the virtuous life, he set up Pythagorean communities which stressed certain taboos, some of them quite similar to caste laws in India, such as vegetarianism, other dietary restrictions, and the wearing of special clothes.[17] Furthermore, from his three classes of men—the lovers of Wisdom, of Honor, and of Gain—which, in addition to its foreshadowing of, and doubtless influence on, Plato's Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Tradesmen,[18] also correspond to the three *gunas* of the *maya*-bound Hindu soul *(Sattva, Rajas,* and *Tamas)* and the castes which represent them *(Brahmins, Kshatriyas,* and *Vaishyas* respectively). In addition, Pythagoras divided a man's life into four stages to represent the four seasons which also correlated in their time periods with the four *ashramas* of Hinduism mentioned in Chapter Two (birth to twenty, twenty-one to forty, forty-one to sixty, and sixty-one to eighty).[19] Finally, his belief in an almost occult use of numbers was also reflected in the writings of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. Plato's mathematical mind was well attuned to this belief as well.[20]

The Questions of Influence

Although the roots to Orphic beliefs appear to have been more indigenous, other influences inevitably played a role. Of the mysteries in general, Edouard Schure argues that foreign influences, and Indian especially, played an important role in the development of their beliefs and practices. As an illustration, he cites the evaluation of Wilford, a Sanskrit linguist, that "Knox Om Pax," the final utterance in the highest initiation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, are of Sanskritic origin.[21] Another important area where Indian influence is suggested was in their funeral practices. According to archaelogical evidence unearthed at Thurii, evidently traditional Greek burials were not sufficient for the Orphics for, like the Indians, they cremated

their dead. Macchioro's explanation for this practice provides a good justification for Hindu cremation as well :

> The goal which they sought by burning their dead was not to bury a dead body, as was customary for the Greeks, but to deliver the soul from its bodily prison and to purify it from the Titanic inheritance. Through the funeral rites they symbolized the break which death made between life and the after-life, the starting point of another destiny.[22]

However, one could also point to indications of Egyptian influence as well, particularly in the borrowing of Egyptian myths (Osiris and Isis, for example) and in the use of sacred tokens and symbols in their ceremonies.

Guthrie, on the other hand, is more impressed with the evidence of Persian influence on the Orphics. What particularly strikes him is that the resemblance between Orphic time (ageless time) in its mythological representation and the Persian *Zrvan Akrana* (endless time) is not merely general but extends to details as well.[23] It leads him to conclude that the origin of the Orphic myths are the result of "a transplantation of Persian religious ideas modified in due course by the transforming genius of the Hellenic mind."[24]

At the end of the first chapter a passage was cited from the *Laws* indicating Plato's belief in two souls. It is passages such as these which have led Voegelin to conclude that in his later years Plato became inclined to couch his theology in Iranian terms. As Voegelin explains : "We know that the circle of the Academy was aware of an inner affinity between the Platonic dualist metaphysics and Iranian eschatology even in Plato's life-time."[25] It should be remembered, in this connection, that the early traditions of Vedic India and Indo-Aryan Iran were nearly the same until the dawn of the Classical Age. The whole sense of Walker's article on the "Aryans" was to stress this commonality until the indigenous Indian influences on the *Rig Veda* which supplanted such common Indo-Persian gods as Dyaus, Indra, and Varuna with Indian ones.[26]

As has been mentioned earlier, the case for Indian influence on the Pythagoreans and the Orphics (with the emphasis on the former) rests primarily on India's being accepted as a source for their belief in transmigration or metempsychosis. To begin with, whatever influence Persian Zoroastrianism may have had on the Pythagoreans and the Orphics, it cannot be argued that transmigration was part of it. The Orphic's central theme of salvation as the liberation of the soul from the body was not an essential feature of Zoroastrianism. Even Zeller, who maintains that the Greeks picked up this belief from the Persians admits that it originated in India.[27] Zoroastrianism was and is primarily a dualistic religion of the struggle between good and evil, lightness and darkness, with a view of the after-life limited to a heaven and hell dichotomy. The nature of the soul and reincarnation are not really addressed.[28]

Unfortunately, on the origin of metempsychosis, Herodotus has been more confusing than helpful. In his *Histories* (Book II, 123), he asserts that the Pythagoreans borrowed the doctrine of reincarnation from Egypt.[29] This assertion has led more than one observer astray in proclaiming that whatever borrowing was done by early Greek philosophy was from Egypt. Much like he misled Megasthenes into an error on the number of castes in India (see p. 49), Herodotus seems once again to have mixed up Egypt and India. As Burnett rather pointedly observed in his *Early Greek Philosophy*, "The Egyptians did not believe in transmigration at all and Herodotus was deceived by the priests or the symbolism of the monument."[30]

Summing up the various arguments for a primarily Indian influence on Pythagoras, Radhakrishnan quotes H.G. Rawlinson in his *Legacy of India :*

> It is more likely that Pythagoras was influenced by India than by Egypt. Almost all the theories, religious, philosophical and mathematical taught by the Pythagoreans, were known in India in the sixth century B.C., and the Pythagoreans, like the Jains and the Buddhists, refrained from the destruction of life and eating meat and regarded certain vegetables as taboo. It seems

also that the so-called Pythagorean theorem of the quadrature of the hypoteneuse was already known to the Indians in the older Vedic times, and thus before Pythagoras.[31]

However, even if Egypt and Persia can be eliminated as possible sources for the Pythagorean and Orphic belief in reincarnation, there remains the possibility that the Orphic strain from Thrace was the exclusive source. Rawlinson observes that transmigration was a tenet neither of the early Greeks nor of the Vedic peoples of India. Homer never mentions it; neither do the hymns of the *Rig Veda*. It does not appear in Greece until the poetry of Pindar (c. 518—438 B. C.), the rites of the Orphics, and the thought of Pythagoras; and in India until the *Chandogya Upanishad*. This leads him to conclude that the two countries developed their views on metempsychosis separately through the more primitive peoples with whom they came in contact : the Greeks with the Thracians and the Indians with the pre-Aryan people (presumably the Dasyus or the Dravidians) of the Indo-Gangetic plain.[32]

At this point, it should be stressed that a belief in transmigration was a very widely spread doctrine in the ancient world, particularly among tribal peoples. For example, it was and still is believed by the Gallic Druids, African Zulus, Greenlander Eskimoes, North American Indians, Dayaks of Borneo, Karens of Burma, and native peoples of New Guinea.[33] Thus, like the wheel discussed in Chapter One, a belief in transmigration *per se* was not terribly distinctive. But what was distinctive was that only the Indians and the Greeks attached to this belief an elaborate doctrine of the soul and path to salvation, building for themselves remarkably similar chariots.

As discussed earlier, A. E. Taylor also propounds the view that the belief in the immortality of the soul stems from two pre-philosophic traditions : one prescribing a path of nearly endless reincarnations until release and the other holding that the soul is a fallen divinity destined, after several rebirths, to regain its place among the gods. Plato, he says, based his beliefs on this latter tradition.[34]

The Case for Indian Roots

Once again, one would do well to exercise caution in setting up too rigid a dichotomy. Certainly, by setting up two such distinct pre-philosophic traditions, it allows for a neat picture of Plato drawing exclusively on Greek or near-Greek sources and eliminates the necessity for opening up a Pandora's box worth of possibilities in contemplating an Indian connection. However, as was emphasized at the very beginning of this discussion on the Pythagoreans and the Orphics, we have entered murky waters where distinctions cannot be made as clearly as Rawlinson and Taylor might like. There are at least four reasons for this. First, a sharp line cannot be drawn between the Pythagoreans and the Orphics based on the historical information currently available, both as to their beliefs and as to their adherents.[35] Second, it is not at all clear that the Orphics got their beliefs on transmigration exclusively from Thrace. As has been pointed out already, they too might have been subjected to Indian influences.

Third, the Hindu view of transmigration or metempsychosis also embodied both pre-philosophic traditions. On the one hand, there was the long path of ceaseless rebirths for those who remained ignorant of their identity with *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality. On the other, there was the short path of the man of wisdom who divested himself of all desires and knew himself to be one with *Brahman*. Such a man became *Brahman* at once and freed from rebirth.[36] In both the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the long path was called *Pitri Yana*, "the path of the fathers," which led to the paradise of "lunar light," a paradise subject to the laws of time and space and requiring of each soul its ultimate rebirth. The short path, for those who were liberated from rebirth, was referred to as the *Deva Yana* in the *Upanishads*, "the path of the bright ones" and "the path of no return" in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.[37]

These two paths actually represented two separate doctrines of reincarnation. The *Pitri Yana* combined the doctrine of

transmigration with the Vedic idea of a recompense in the other world based on the you-reap-what-you-sow principle of *karman*. The *Deva Yana*, on the other hand, expounded a doctrine of rebirth due to desire rather than *karman*. A soul received what it desired; and if, through ascetic discipline, meditation, and reminiscence, it ceased to desire, it would suffer no more births and become immortal. According to this doctrine, *karman* was operative only as the connecting link between desire and rebirth because whatever a man desired he willed, and whatever he willed he acted.[38]

Perhaps no myth illustrated this doctrine better than Plato's Myth of Er. Moreover, the imagery used to describe the *Deva Yana* was synonymous with the ascent to the light of the Absolute Good in the *Republic*'s Myth of the Cave as well as with the initiation ceremonies of the Orphic Mysteries. Dasgupta quotes Deussen as saying, "the soul on the way of the gods reaches regions of ever-increasing light—on the way to Brahman the 'light of lights'."[39]

Finally, however, even accepting the dubious proposition of a rigid distinction between Orphic reincarnation and Pythagorean, Plato did not fit neatly into one tradition or the other. Granted, in broad structure the Platonic picture was closer to the view of the Orphics and the *Deva Yana*. There were only ten reincarnations to his scheme, with only three for true philosophers, and the goal was to reclaim a lost divinity, but Plato's reliance on this tradition cannot be regarded as exclusive. He talked also of absorption. The element of choice delineated in the Myth of Er was wrapped up in one's earthly experience and bore the stamp of the laws of *karman*, but the choice itself on one's next life was based fundamentally on desire. Also, the notion of the Demi-Urge and Absolute Idea described in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo* were more akin to the Ultimate Reality of the *Upanishads* than Orphism's Abode of the Blessed.

With the lines of distinction between these "pre-philosophic" traditions properly confused or intermingled, the case for an Indian influence on Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis may now be presented. By the time of Pythagoras, who represented the

earlier stages of Greek philosophy, India, with the *Upanishads* completed, was at a very high stage of philosophical attainment. Its view of *samsara* (metempsychosis) had developed to the point where it was no longer tied to popular mythology and the gods (as was the Thracian), but had moved from the corporeal to a very abstract concept of absorption into an Ultimate Reality no longer dependent on, and far removed from, examples, parallels, or explanations derived from the sensate world. This was a stage of sophistication not reached in Greek thought until Plato's Universal Ideas.

Earlier in this chapter reference was made to Taylor's two pre-philosophic traditions of transmigration, one of infinite reincarnations to final absorption and the other of a few cycles duration to the recapturing of a divine nature. Subsequent discussion has shown that these two traditions were developed into full-blown doctrines of salvation in only ancient India and Classical Greece, with the Orphics and Hindu *Deva Yana* representing the short path and the Pythagoreans and *Priti Yana* representing the long path (allowing, among all parties, a great deal of overlap). This situation is symbolically analagous to the invention of wheels and chariots discussed at the end of Chapter One. A spontaneous, independent development of the idea of transmigration, like the wheel is certainly credible; however, when this idea is developed into two doctrines similar down to almost the minute details, like two chariots, or in this case, two pairs of similar chariots, one is almost impelled to assume some contact between the chariot-makers or cultures.

Given this assumption, the question remains : who influenced whom ? The simple answer is whoever came earlier. However, a simple and irrefutable answer to this question is not possible. While most scholars have reached a consensus on Pythagoras' living from 582 to 506 B.C., the origins of Orphism are shrouded in mystery. Guthrie observes that there is a general agreement that Orphic activity was considerable by the sixth century B.C. Orphic scriptures, furthermore, were in existence by the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. and were believed, then, to have been ancient.[40] Mention was made in Chapter One about the

difficulty in assigning dates to events and developments in ancient India. However, few modern scholars contest both Dasgupta's and Radhakrishnan's contention that the early *Upanishads* (which contain the teachings on metempsychosis outlined above) were written from the eighth to the sixth centuies B. C.[41] On balance, then, it appears that the Hindu doctrines of metempsychosis are at least one or two hundred years earlier than those of the Greeks, and thus the direction of influence for these teachings, if there was any, had to have been from India to Greece.

Once again, it must be acknowledged that there is no evidence available to the modern scholar to directly confirm this hypothesis. It has been shown that there were historical contacts between the two peoples, that there probably were Indians in Athenian society, and that there may even have been a dialogue between Socrates and *Brahmin* seers. In addition, the similarities in practices between the Hindus and both the Pythagoreans and the Orphics have been noted as well as the singular accord between them on their doctrines of metempsychosis, with most accounts conceding that the Indians articulated these views much earlier than the Greeks. While all this does not add up to proof, it does depict, I submit, a consistent and convincing explanation based on the information available.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that Eric Voegelin in the fourth volume of his *Order and History* was forced for a variety of reasons to abandon his task of presenting a historical movement from the Beginning to the Beyond along a straight time line dimension. One of these reasons was his appreciation of parallel differentiations of consciousness in the first millenium B. C. extending from Hellas to China.[42] In discovering these parallel developments, while refusing to accept a single source for these cultural diffusions, Voegelin did not assume they proceeded in isolation from each other. In fact, as has been already pointed out earlier in this chapter, he contended that Plato's theology in his later years came under increasing Iranian influence.[43]

IIFLUENCES ON PLATO

With a consideration of Plato once again introduced, it is time to assess the intimacy of Plato's association with, and indebtedness to, the Pythagoreans and the Orphics.

Even if only half the reports are true, Plato's (and Socrates') associations with both the Pythagoreans and the Orphics were both varied and intimate. Both Plato and Socrates are reported to have studied with Pythagoreans. While Laertius' assertion that Socrates was a pupil of Pythagoras[44] cannot be true (Socrates was born roughly thirty-five years after Pythagoras' death), he was certainly well acquainted with Pythagoreanism. The *Phaedo*, which was about Socrates' last hour, included a lecture by Socrates to two young men, Simmias and Cebes, who were pupils of the Pythagorean Philolaus, reminding them of the religious foundations of the movement.[45]

Socrates' religious convictions in the latter part of his life were said to have become mystical, and embraced a full adoption of the transmigration of souls and of their rewards and punishments in the afterlife.[46] He says as much in the *Apology* when he tries to explain his martyrdom.[47] In the dialogue *Euthyphro*, the questioner, Euthyphro, assumes that Socrates is an Orphic, an assumption which is never actually denied.[48] However, Schure is probably right in observing that in order to preserve his role as a public exponent to all, he refused to have himself initiated into the Mysteries.[49]

Plato's associations with the Pythagoreans were no less intimate. There is little reason to dispute the account of his studying under the Pythagoreans Archytas and Timaeus in 387 B. C.[50] As a master Plato evidently made frequent use of Pythagorean materials at his Academy. In his Thirteenth Letter (360c), he wrote the following to Dionysius :

> With a view of promoting the object (the wisdom of Dionysius), I am sending you some bits of Pythagorean work.[51]

Regarding Plato's philosophy, no less an authority than Aristotle, Plato's most famous pupil, said that his mentor fol-

lowed the teachings of Pythagoreans very closely.[52] The evidence for this is quite plain. Barker notes that Pythagoras' doctrine of the three classes of men made a deep impression on Plato, although this also may have reflected a common Indo-European way of looking at society. Nevertheless, he observes :

> The whole framework and scaffolding of the *Republic*, which depends on the analysis of the state into three classes and the Soul into three parts may be said to be Pythagorean.[53]

Indeed Plato's concept of the soul, so critical to his philosophy, appear to ring with Pythagoreanism at every corner in which one encounters it. The idea of the soul's triplicity, and its harmony being dependent on the quality of temperance achieved when the mind is fully in control are tenets fundamental to both men.[54] When Plato talks of this temperance as a blending together, in a perfectly adjusted harmony, of the three elements of the mind comparable to the higher, middle, and lower notes of the scale, his allusion to the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres is not even subtle.[55] In the *Phaedo*, Plato (or Socrates) even comes close to acknowledging his debt to the Pythagoreans for the doctrine of reminiscence. Socrates, in talking to Cebes (a Pythagorean), says it is unnecessary to go into the proof of the doctrines since Cebes already knows what it is.[56] At least tacitly, Plato (or Socrates) is hereby admitting that reminiscence, one of the cardinal teachings of his philosophy, did not originate with either himself or Socrates.

In addition, like Socrates, Plato was no stranger to the Mysteries. In his Seventh Letter (333e), Plato talks of the Mysteries with an easy familiarity.[57] As just one example of many close affiliations, the dialogue *Protagoras* takes place in the home of Callias, a prominent and wealthy Athenian who held the hereditary position of torch-bearer in the Eleusinian Mysteries.[58] Guthrie maintains that beyond these associations, the Orphics' dualistic doctrine of the soul in which the soul must be purified from its evil body fascinated Plato and thoroughly permeated his dialogue *Phaedo*. He further contends that

this dualistic doctrine helped Plato make his characteristic separation of the lower world of *sensa* from the heavenly world of Ideas.[59] In fact, in an exceedingly rare gesture, Plato, in the *Cratylus* (400 c.) formally recognizes the Orphics as the originator of this idea :

> Now some say that the body *(soma)* is the *sema* of the soul...In my opinion it is the followers of Orpheus who are chiefly responsible for giving it the name, holding that the soul is undergoing punishment for some reason or other, and has this husk around it, like a prison, to keep it from running away.[60]

If there remains any skepticism about Plato's knowledge of, and deep dependence upon, both Pythagoreans and the Orphics for some of his most important teachings (the soul, for example), then if the following words from Plato himself (in the *Meno* 80e) cannot provide a resolution, nothing can. They are, in effect, words of acknowledgement such as are found in the preface to any contemporary scholarly work :

> Those who tell it (the truth about the soul) are priestly men and women of the kind who make it their business to be able to give an account of what they take in hand to do... They say that soul of man is immortal, and that at one time it comes to an end (which they like the rest of men call dying), and at another is reborn, but is never finally exterminated... For those "from whom Persephone received requital for ancient doom, in the ninth year she gives back their soul to the sun above. From them grow glorious kings, and men swift in strength and greatest in wisdom, and hereafter they are called spotless heroes by men" (Plato quoting Pinder). The soul then being immortal and often reborn, and having seen all things, both things here and those in Hades, has learned everything that there is.[61]

Thus does Plato make his link with the Pythagoreans and the Orphics plain. As a truly responsible scholar and philos-

opher, he should also recognize that at least the last part of this acknowledgement about omniscience comes from the *Jnana-Yoga* (way of knowledge) of the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad-Gita*, of which Pythagoras was most likely the medium, but not the originator.

Notes And References

1. For the purposes of this study, Socrates and Plato are taken together as the hyphen, Socrates–Plato. Although historically they were certainly separate individuals, virtually all of Socrates' thought comes to us in Plato's writings. While in some investigations it may be important to try to separate the thought of the two men, it makes very little difference here. Plato was so intimately associated with Socrates that it may be safely assumed that if Hindu thought influenced Socrates, it also affected Plato.

2. Cyril E. Robinson, A *History of Greece*, ninth edition (New York : Barnes and Noble, Inc,, 1957), p. 164.
3. Vittorio D. Macchioro, *From Orpheus to Paul : A History of Orphism* (New York : Henry Holt and Co., 1930), pp. 140-42.
4, J. B. Bury, S. A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock, eds,, *The Persian Empire and the West*, vol. 4 : *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge, England : The University Press, 1924), p. 535. It requires little imagination here to see where Plato might have received the inspiration for the *Republic*'s famous Myth of the Cave.
5. Guthrie, p. 157.
6. Ibid, p. 164.
7. Taylor, p. 186.
8. Guthrie, pp. 169-70, 184.
9. Laertius, p. 338.
10. Ibid., p. 339.
11. Edwin L. Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics in Practice and Therory* (Baltimore : Waverly Press, Inc., 1942), p. 4 (n. 15).
12. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, translated by Thomas Taylor (London ; John M. Watkins 1965), p. 9.
13. Laertius, p. 342.
14. James A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Toronto :

University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 125.
15. Laertius, p. 351, and Thomas Katsaros and Nathaniel Kaplan, *The Western Mystical Tradition : An Intellectual History of Western Civilization*, vol. 1 (New Haven, Conn. : College and University Press, 1969), pp. 40-41.
16. Laertius, pp. 39-40.
17. Ibid, pp. 346-48.
18. Barker, p. 49.
19. Laertius, p. 342.
20. Urwick, p. 181.
21. Edouard Schure, *The Mysteries of Ancient Greece : Orpheus/Plato* (New York : Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1971), p. 120.
22. Macchioro, p. 119.
23. Guthrie, p. 87.
24. Ibid, p. 91.
25. Voegelin, vol. 3, p. 285.
26. Walker, vol. 1, pp. 69-72.
27. Eduard Zeller *Outline of the History of the Greek Philosophy*, thirteenth edition, translated by L R. Palmer (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 16.
28. Dhalla, pp. 11-19, and A. R. Wadia, "Persian Thought : Philosophy in Zoroastrianism," in *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western*, vol. 2, pp. 20-24.
29. Guthrie, p. 170.
30. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 142.
31. Ibid, p. 143. Several other Oriental scholars concur with Rawlinson's assessment Winternitz remarks, "As regards Pythagoras, it seems to me very probably that he became acquainted with Indian doctrines in Persia." (*Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Feb. 1937), p. 8. Also in agreement are Sir Wiliam Jones (*Works*, iii. 236), Colebrooke [*Miscellaneous Essays*, 1. 436 ff.), Shroeder (*Pythagoras und die Inder)*, Garbe (*Philosophy of Ancient India*, pp. 39 ff.), Hopkins (*Religions of India*, pp. 559-60), and Macdonnell (*Sanskrit Literature*, p. 422). Notable in his dissent is A. Berriedale Keith ("Pythagoras and the Doctrine of Transmigration," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1909, pp. 569 ff). (For the above references, see ibid.)
32. Rawlinson, p. 156.
33. Theodor Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers : A History of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 1, translated by Laurie Magnus (London : John Murray, 1906), p. 124.
34. Taylor, p. 186.

35. The pythagorean communities or brotherhoods evidently contained political overtones because they soon attracted the suspicions of the

Greek city-states. At the beginning of the sixth century B.C. they were actively persecuted and the brotherhoods were dispersed. Many of the scattered members reappeared to join the Orphic Mysteries. This, of course, renders any attempt at distinguishing between the two doubly complicated. (See : Urwick, p. 197.)

36. Dasgupta, p. 58.
37. *Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 77.
38. Dasgupta, pp. 53-57.
39. Ibid. p. 54.
40. Guthrie, p. 11.
41. Dasgupta, p. 28; and Azad, p. 19.
42. Voegelin, vol. 4, pp. 1-8.
43. See n. 25 above.
44. Laertius, p. 358.
45. Taylor, p. 175.
46. Barker, p. 95.
47. Taylor, p. 167.
48. Ibid., p. 147.
49. Schure, p. 84. In this connection it is relevant to note that it was also prudent politically for Socrates to have kept his associations with the Mysteries discreet. They had become centers for intrigue by the aristocratic classes, and there were crack-downs launched against them in 415 and 399 B. C. by suspicious democrats. Burnett, for one, maintained that Socrates' associations with the Orphics helped to create a climate of prejudice against him at his trial. (See : Barker, p. 95).
50. Eduard Zeller, *Plato and the Older Academy*, translated by Sarah Frances Alleyne and Alfred Goodwin (London : Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), P. 20.
51. Plato, *The Platonic Epistles*, p. 157.
52. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 148.
53. Barker, p. 49.
54. Ibid, p. 163.
55. Ibid, p. 173.
56. Taylor, p 186.
57. Plato, *The Platonic Epistles*, p. 126.
58. Taylor, p. 237.
59. Guthrie, p. 157.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid, p. 165.

CHAPTER—V

CONCLUSION

Central Thesis

THE WIDER context of this study has been that of an examination of the rather glib assumption of a rigid distinction between the cultures and intellectual traditions—"mind-sets," in contemporary parlance—of the Orient and the Occident as represented by Classical Greece and Hindu India. The question underlying this investigation has been : in an analysis of the roots of these two traditions, can this assumption of a rigid dichotomy be justified ? To provide a concrete grounding to this question, the focus has been on the possible Hindu influences on the thought of Plato, specifically his views on the soul and its salvation through reincarnation and reminiscence. The search, then, has been for a bridge between the two cultures.

In the course of this analysis, the following conclusions have been noted. First, the number of coincidences between Classical Greece and Classical India in general and between Platonic and Hindu teachings in particular are more than sufficient to justify the suspicion that the correlations are more than random and require an explanation. Second, in confronting the historical evidence, it was found to be completely possible for Plato to have come in contact with Indian thought and even to have discoursed with Hindu seers, although no direct and reliable reports of this were uncovered. Third, despite these historical possibilities, the complete silence of Plato on the subject of India, when he so freely talked about many other "barbarian" societies, might have decisively confirmed his ignorance of it, were it not for the escape hatch of the rather

universal Classical Greek practice of not mentioning their sources. However, Aristotle, casting a small ray of light on the situation, admitted knowledge of India based on the Skylax account, an account surely known to Plato. Thus, the possibility of Hindu influence on Plato was still not precluded. Fourth, the Pythagoreans and the Orphic Mysteries were investigated as transmitters of Hindu thought. While Plato's indebtedness to the Pythagoreans and the Orphics was clearly established, mainly by his own words, the endeavor to confirm a similar link between the Pythagoreans and the Orphics and the Hindus, and thus between Plato and the Hindus, was not totally successful. The possibility was there. The coincidences were there. In fact, the delineation of the Hindu paths of the salvation of the soul placed side by side with those of the Pythagoreans and the Orphics are so similar that an explanation involving contact between the two cultures is almost required. If there was this contact, then the general consensus among scholars that the Hindu teachings of metempsychosis were at least one or two centuries older than those of the Greeks makes the assumption necessary that, on this score at least, it was the Indians who influenced the Greeks.

In sum, the net effect of this package of societal commonalities, historical connections, coincidental practices, chronological feasibilities, and even identical philosophic doctrines is to require the conclusion that, at least on circumstantial grounds, some Hindu influence on both the Pythagoreans and the Orphics must be accepted. *Consequently, it is the central thesis of this study that Plato, through the Pythagoreans and also the Orphics, was subjected to the influence of Hindu thought, but that he may not have been aware of it as coming from India.* Ideas travel faster and farther than their footnotes, and in an era and place where sources were never acknowledged anyway, *atman,* the concept, was easier to ingest than Yajnavalkya, the name.

Nevertheless, however plausible this thesis may be, it cannot be proved. Perhaps it is enough to accept A. L. Basham's judgment :

> We can only say that there was always some contact between the Hellenic world and India, mediated by the Achaemenid Empire.[1]

Whatever may or may not be said about the connections between the Hindus and Plato, they were clearly dealing with the same intellectual and spiritual questions, and even coming up with many similar answers. At a minimum, it should also be abundantly clear that the intellectual roots of the "mind–sets" of the Orient and the Occident are not as far apart as the unexamined suppositions of conventional wisdom contend. Even the circumstantial evidence presented in this paper, while perhaps not wholly convincing, should be sufficient to caution against over-dramatizing this cleavage between East and West. Finally, despite the historical setting of this paper, matters of roots are not without their contemporary significance.

Context of Circulating Ideas

An implication of this study is that, whatever the cleavages which may separate the East and West today, during the epoch of the intellectual roots of the Classical Greek and Hindu civilizations in the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C., these intellectual fathers were working from a remarkably common base of ideas, given all of the geographic, economic, political, and social obstacles to communication. Despite these formidable barriers, this base of ideas developed in a fertile context of circulating ideas. While most cultures in this era regarded foreigners as "barbarians," few were too proud to learn from them or adopt some of their practices. The Persians wanted Greek mercenaries. The Indians envied Syrian astronomy. Many countries copied the Phoenician alphabet.

Even the haughty Greeks saw profit in observing the foreigners. Plato, in his *Laws* (Book XII), attached great importance to keeping abreast of ideas and developments in foreign countries, and proposed that carefully selected "observers" sally forth on foreign journeys to glean what was worthwhile from abroad.[2] In the back of his mind he may have had Pythagoras as a model.

This study, in looking particularly at the similarity of the doctrine of metempsychosis in India and Greece, can be seen as one attempt to investigate the notion of a context of circulating ideas from the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. To confirm or dispell this notion, other researches into other intellectual ideas for common beliefs in both contiguous and widely separated places need to be carried out. For example, were there important similarities between Athenian democracy and the tribal republics of ancient India ? Or, was there a link between Egyptian, Persian, and Indian ideas of kingship ?

The core of this notion is that today, rather than the East and West facing each other across a chasm of parallel lines which never meet, perhaps these two over-simplified cultural designations of "Orient" and "Occident" stand at the two peaks of a letter "V." However far apart they may find themselves now, at the roots of their cultural values and intellectual traditions they partook, at the base of the "V," of a common context of circulating ideas.

For the future, the task is to invert another "V" over the top of the first one so that a common context of circulating ideas may be rediscovered. In my view, this is precisely what Ralph Braibanti calls for in his concept of "spiralling contextuality." His plea is for an end to a pattern of relationships based on ill-conceived assumptions of superiority and inferiority implicit in the donor-recipient relationship of foreign aid, for example. Instead there should be a global sharing of ideas where all may profit from each other's transitory competencies much like Plato proposed in his system of foreign "observers" in the fourth century B. C.[3]

Notes And References

1. Basham, p. 486.
2. Plato, *The Laws*, translated with an Introduction by Trevor J. Saunders (Baltimore : Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 501-03.

3. For a full explication of his provocative notion of "spiralling contextuality," see : Ralph Braibanti, "Conceptual Prerequisites for the Evolution of Asian Bureaucratic Systems," in Inayatullah, ed., *The Management Training for Development : The Asian Experience* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia : The Asian Centre for Development Administration, 1975), pp. 185-231.

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